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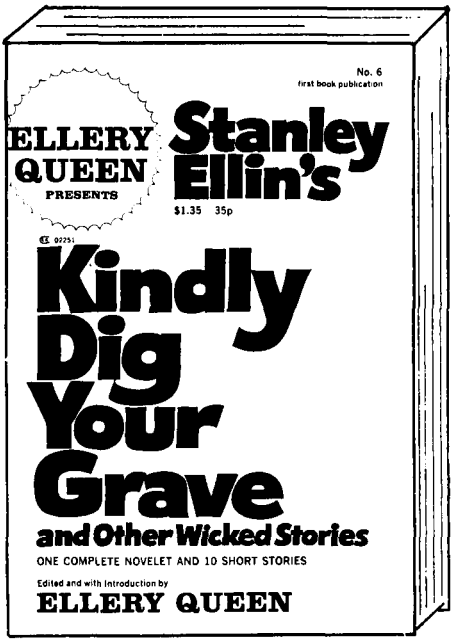

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Mystery Magazine

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a *NEW* Virgil Tibbs story by

JOHN BALL

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Now join the famous black detective in his first short-story investigation—and we do mean investigation. Virgil Tibbs is the ranking homicide specialist of the Pasadena (California) Police Department—"at the top of the death-by-violence totem pole." He is a one-man procedural 'tec task force, and in his first short story he tackles a difficult and unusual case . . .

ONE FOR VIRGIL TIBBS

by JOHN BALL

At 11:31 a.m. on an unusually fine morning in Pasadena, California, the operator of a power shovel swung a full load of soil over the top of a heavy truck and pulled the release. Since the truck was almost full, a small shower of stones rattled off the sides, some loose dirt, and one human skull.

Fortunately Harry Hubert, male, 31, was working close by. As he raised his arm to signal the truck driver to move on he looked down, then froze in his tracks. "Hold it!" he yelled.

He was not a superstitious man, but he did not want to handle the skull. He signaled the shovel operator to cease digging, pointed to what he had discovered, then waved his arms in the air

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to be sure that everyone understood that all work was to stop.

The shovel operator brought his machine to a halt and the truck driver shut off his engine.

Superintendent Angelo Morelli was sent for. Meanwhile, the truck driver got out of his cab and joined Hubert to find out what was wrong. He looked down at the object on the ground, bent over to examine it more closely, then spoke. "Alas, poor Yorick," he said.

He was an admirer of Sir Laurence Olivier.

Superintendent Morelli was a man accustomed to making decisions. It took him only seconds to assay the situation, then he sent for the police.

One of the all-white Pasadena patrol cars responded promptly. It arrived without lights or siren, and as the working officer driving it got out, Morelli wondered, What the hell. The officer was a woman and a comely one at that.

As soon as she was close enough, he read the nameplate over her right pocket. It said DIAZ.

Morelli checked her over. She was armed, of course; metal handcuffs were properly pouched on her belt, and there was even a small container of Mace visible.

The superintendent approached her. Although he was a rough-and-ready type, he also knew how to be diplomatic. "I certainly appreciate your quick response," he said. "However, I'm not sure this is suitable for a policewoman."

"I'm not a policewoman," she answered. "I'm a cop. Where's the fight?"

Morelli was amused. "No fight this time," he reassured her. "Do you get many of those?"

"I broke one up last night—knives in a bar. I have a suspect in custody."

"Then kindly step this way."

Officer Marilyn Diaz spent three minutes in a careful survey of the situation. Then, despite her immaculate uniform, which was the same as the ones worn by the male members of the department, she explored the fresh excavation and the approximate spot where the skull had been unearthed.

She had one question for the shovel operator. "Is there any way you can tell," she asked, "how deeply that skull was buried when you dug it up?"

"No, ma'am, because I started my pass at the bottom of the cut

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and came up. I would guess that it was somewhere near to the top."

"So would I," Diaz agreed. "Hold everything, will you?"

"Right."

Officer Marilyn Diaz, who is one of the particular prides of the Pasadena Police, returned to her car and picked up the radio mike. Socially she was an attractive and charming young woman; on the job she did not waste words. "I've got one for Virgil," she reported. "At the Foothill Freeway construction site, near Raymond."

"Paramedics wanted?"

"No, human remains, but so far bones only."

"Anything else?"

"Yes," Diaz answered. "I've seen the skull. Unless I'm very wrong, the victim was an eight-to-ten-year-old child."

On the wall of the small office he shared with his partner, Bob Nakamura, Virgil Tibbs had a small sign posted. It read: *Write, for the night is coming.* He was engaged in doing precisely that, presiding over a manual typewriter and punching out the words of a report that, by police tradition, would be hopelessly pedantic and at least twice the necessary length. He spent hours writing reports, as did practically everyone else in the department. It was the curse of the profession.

His phone rang. He took the call, listened, then got up and put on his coat. As the ranking homicide specialist of the Pasadena Police, the discovery of an unattached skull was referred to him automatically. Ray Heatherton could have handled it, but Ray was only too delighted to let Virgil Tibbs sit at the top of the death-by-violence totem pole. Virgil had earned the spot many times over.

Virgil picked up an unmarked car, drove to the location, parked behind Marilyn Diaz' unit, then walked over to where the people were gathered.

Superintendent Morelli saw him coming, noted that he was black, and remembered what he had read in the papers. "Is that Virgil Tibbs?" he asked Diaz.

"It is," she answered.

"He's good, I understand."

"The best."

Seconds later she made the introductions. Morelli shook hands,

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then got down to business. "As soon as the skull showed up, we stopped everything immediately." He motioned to a hardhat who was waiting close by. "This is Harry Hubert, he was the first to spot it."

Virgil listened to the man's account, then talked to the truck driver and the shovel operator. After that he addressed himself once more to Morelli. "I don't want to hold you up," he said. "I know that tying up men and equipment is costing you money and job delay. If you need the shovel somewhere else, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't move it. I'll need the truck until we can check the load in detail. Also, I want to go over the spot where the dirt is being dumped."

"I thought of that," Morelli said. "I stopped the unloading immediately. I don't believe anything has been moved since Harry saw that skull come off the truck."

"For that I'll buy you your lunch," Tibbs said.

"You're on."

"Fine. While we're eating, there are a few questions you might be able to answer for me."

Sergeant Jerry Ferguson headed the investigation team that arrived almost immediately thereafter. Since there was obviously pick-and-shovel work to be done, Superintendent Morelli assigned a half dozen men to work under Ferguson's direction. With Agent Barry Rothberg three of them left for the fill area where the dirt from the excavation was being dumped. At a convenient spot the filled truck that had taken the last load from the power shovel spread out what it had on board as another police unit arrived headed by Lieutenant Ron Peron.

Under careful examination the load that had been on the truck yielded up three additional bones and part of a spinal column. That grisly discovery was made shortly before Captain Bill Wilson arrived to see how the investigation was progressing.

By nightfall a set of foot bones that was almost intact had been discovered *in situ*. Its position suggested that the body, which had presumably been buried not long after death, had lain approximately four feet, three inches below the surface of the ground, with the head in an easterly direction. After extensive photographs had been taken, and measurements made, the few recovered bones were turned over to the Los Angeles County coroner. Even careful sifting gave no hope of recovering the complete

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skeleton, a point that disturbed Virgil Tibbs.

Satisfied that for the moment no more evidence would be found at the location, he authorized Superintendent Morelli to resume the construction work. He did ask that careful watch be kept while the remaining digging was done in the immediate vicinity —unauthorized burials were not always single projects. After the amount of searching that had already been done, he did not feel he could halt the important and expensive project any further without something definite in the form of additional evidence.

In the morning Tibbs went to work with grim determination. From the real-estate maps he located the exact piece of property that had marked the spot where the remains had been uncovered. It had been a single-family dwelling on a medium-sized lot in a definitely lower-class neighborhood. There had been no basement.

By the time he had these facts, the coroner's office called: the bone specialist was on the line. Virgil talked to the doctor for several minutes and was not encouraged by the conversation. From the skull it had been determined that the deceased had been a child approximately eight years of age. But no information could be given either as to race or sex. "You mean you can't say whether it was a boy or a girl?" Tibbs asked.

"That's right. The indications simply aren't present at that age."

"Can you make an informed guess?"

"Not based on what I have here."

The black detective was patient. "What *can* you tell me?" he persisted.

"The individual is deceased. Beyond that, only what you already have."

"Any dental data?"

"I should have mentioned that, forgive me. So far as can be determined, and this is pretty definite, the deceased never had any dental work done. But this doesn't necessarily indicate neglect; the subject could have been seen by a dentist who found that no work was required."

"And the age of the remains?"

"Say from three years back. There are several reasons why I can't be more definite."

"I think I know what they are," Virgil said. "Thank you, Doctor."

"You're most welcome."

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Virgil turned to Bob Nakamura. "All I have to worry about now is a missing child, male or female, ethnic background unknown, who disappeared anytime from, say, three years ago to you-say-when. And the fact that all the bones were not located after very careful search suggests that the corpse may have been cut up and buried in various places."

Bob was sympathetic. "Tough case, but not impossible. You have the specific house to work with—that should tell you a lot. Better than that corpse in the nudist park."

"Hell, yes, that took weeks." And Virgil went back to work.

By noon he had the picture. The house had last been occupied by an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Ajurian. Mrs. Ajurian was recently dead; her husband was in a nursing home in a senile condition. The Ajurians had no known living relatives. Before their occupancy the house had stood vacant for almost three years, tied up in litigation because the owner had been killed in a car accident.

Prior to that the house had been rented on a month-to-month basis, frequently to young people who had been required to pay in advance, and occasionally to transient farm labor. The house itself had been moved away when the area had been cleared for the freeway. It had been offered at auction, but no bids had been received.

Two hours after lunch the house itself was located. It stood, helpless and unwanted, in a row of similar derelicts that had been parked in an available open area. As Virgil explored it minutely, he could not escape a feeling of profound depression. It was in a wretched state of outside repair and, if possible, was even worse inside.

The single bathroom had been painted a particularly violent purple and despite long disuse, it still carried a faintly unpleasant odor indicative of bad sanitation. Where the telephone had been, the walls were covered with jottings in various hands; the smaller bedroom had children's crude drawings covering most of the wall space within their reach. None of the drawings revealed any talent either in art or draftsmanship.

The floor in one closet was missing; the rectangular opening had the remains of a ledge that had once, obviously, held an unattached trap door. There was, of course, nothing unusual in that —it was a conventional access hole—but something else about the house interested Tibbs. When he had spent the better part of an

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hour examining the structure, he thanked the employee of the house mover who was serving as his guide.

"Did you find out anything?" the man asked, walking outside with Virgil.

"Yes, I think so."

"What?"

Virgil nodded down the long row of empty shells, the tombstones of what had once been homes. "Did you notice anything different about this one?" he asked.

"Not particularly. Most of them were in pretty bad shape when they came out here."

"It's at least two feet higher off the ground than any of the others," Tibbs said. "A little more than five feet between the surface of the ground and the bottom of the floor joists. Room enough for a man to work in, if he had to."

Meanwhile, Bob Nakamura determined, by interviewing some of their one-time neighbors, that the Ajurians had been a quiet elderly couple who had never entertained and seldom went out. They were judged to have been capable of only the simplest physical tasks. No children had ever been seen on their premises. The only criticism that the Nisei detective turned up was that they frequently cooked food so heavily spiced that the odor was objectionable. A check of the records revealed that they had been on welfare.

During the time the house had stood vacant, it had been frequently used as a juvenile and young-adult rendezvous; several arrests had been made, but there had never been any indications of violence.

One former long-time resident of the street recalled a Mexican family that had lived in the house. There had been eight or nine children; he did not remember the family name, but he did recall how the kids were incessantly running in and out and slamming the door each time. He had been glad when they moved away. He also remembered a group of six young people, three long-haired males and three females, who had taken up residence, but who had been surprisingly quiet and peaceful.

By the time all this information had been gathered, another day had gone by.

Most of the next day went into a careful examination of all

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available missing-juvenile reports that fell within the proper time frame. They added up to a heartbreaking number. Dental charts ruled out most of them, but Tibbs was left with over fifty possibles and sixteen that offered the best prospects of a make. When that tedious task had at last been completed, he sat back in his chair and began to think.

Bob Nakamura had seen him like that before, his eyes open but unfocused, his body relaxed. After half an hour, Virgil stirred and Bob was prepared. "It's a damn tough case," Bob said.

Tibbs nodded slowly. "Yes," he agreed, "but if I can put one or two more things together, I may have it."

"Accidental death?" Bob asked.

Virgil shook his head. "No—murder."

"The evidence of that is in the remains?"

"No."

"What else do you need?"

"I want to go back and re-examine that house. But before I do that, I've got some other work to do." He got up and stretched. "I'll see you after a while," he said, and left.

The voter-registration lists gave him some information, much of it quite old. He went over the available data carefully, but found little to excite his interest. The Mexican family that had lived in the house had never registered anyone, a fact that suggested they might have been illegal immigrants—a major problem in Southern California. On the other hand, it could have been indifference or an inability to understand English.

The welfare rolls were more productive. From them Virgil learned that Emilio and Rosa De Fuentes, plus their nine children, had been publicly supported at that address for some time.

That was a breakthrough. Knowing that welfare recipients often retained that status for years, he sent out a message through the network in California to learn if the same family was now being carried on the rolls elsewhere. That accomplished, Virgil once more took refuge in his second-floor office in the old part of the Pasadena Police building, leaned back, and went into another session of concentrated thought.

When he finally came up for air, Bob Nakamura was back and ready to play straight man. "Are you any nearer?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Fill me in."

Tibbs stirred. "A lot of things are beginning to fit together. My

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chief problem at the moment is the lack of hard data to back up some of my conclusions."

"Let's hear the conclusions."

"All right. We begin with the Ajurians, the Armenian immigrants."

"You dug that far back?"

"No, but I know they were immigrants because of the way they cooked their food. People direct from the old country tend to continue life as they knew it, particularly where diet is concerned. Second- and third-generation offspring from that part of the world prefer less spicy food. The Armenian part is easy because the name ends in *i-a-n,* something almost wholly Armenian."

"Go on."

"The evidence supports the fact that they were relatively feeble, and did not entertain, particularly children. Also, I'm inclined to rule out the hippie sextet who lived in the house for a while. I learned a lot from the drawings I found on the walls of one of the rooms."

"Explain."

Tibbs swung around to face his partner. "Obviously they weren't made during the time the elderly Ajurians were occupying the house. Yet they didn't remove them. They were on the wall of what would have been the the second bedroom. The inference, therefore, is that they didn't remove the drawings because a fresh paint job was beyond their physical resources, or financial means. I suspect they closed off that room and used it only for storage.

"The hippie sextet also left the drawings alone—perhaps they found them amusing. It wasn't their house, they were simply living in it, and they probably favored self-expression. They weren't made during that period since I have statements that no children were seen around the house while the hippies were there."

"The drawings could have been faked—done by an adult."

Tibbs shook his head. "The only idea that holds water along that line would be an adult making them to entertain a child who used that room—but again, there were no children reported on the premises."

He stopped suddenly. For a moment or two he stared off into space with his lips held tightly together, then a whole new expression took over his face. "It's a long shot, but worth checking out." He got up once more.

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"Where are you going this time?"

"I need a social worker and a grocery store," Virgil answered.

The social worker proved to be unavailable. After tracking her down, Tibbs learned that she had gone to Europe and was somewhere in Spain studying the guitar. He made a note of her name and background, then began his canvass of the grocery stores. That proved a much easier job; he hit paydirt within an hour.

Sam Margolis had operated his small market and liquor store at the same location for many years. He knew most of his customers well, and he recalled the De Fuentes family. "Too damn many kids," he declared. "She usually brought a lot of them with her and they couldn't keep their hands off anything. They even swiped ice cubes and sucked on them."

"They were on welfare, I believe."

"Yeah, they were. But the old man usually found enough money for a bottle. He wasn't a drunk, but he hit the cheap stuff a lot."

"Have you any idea where they went?"

Margolis shrugged. "Who knows? And to be honest, who cares? This is a cash business only—no checks except for welfare and payroll that I know. Two will get you five they were wetbacks, or whatever they call them now. And the woman—" He shook his head. "What he saw in her I'll never know. She was built like a pile of mashed potatoes."

"You've helped me a lot," Tibbs said. "More than you know. One thing more if you can remember. Were all the children that you saw normal, at least reasonably so?"

"All that I saw."

"And do you remember if they had a boy in his teen years, anywhere from about thirteen or fourteen up?"

Margolis was definite. "Sure, Felipe. He came to the store sometimes."

"What was he like?" Virgil asked.

"Another Mex kid," Margolis answered.

When Virgil Tibbs got back to his office, there was news for him: Mr. and Mrs. Emilio De Feuntes and their eleven children were on welfare in Modesto, California. In response Tibbs picked up his phone and called the police department there. When he had been put through to a detective sergeant, he made a request. He described the family and supplied the welfare case number to make things as easy as possible.

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"What I need," Virgil said, "is some information on when they reached Modesto and precisely when they went on welfare. I'd like a copy of the original document accepting them as welfare clients. Then, if it isn't too much trouble, I'd like the birth records of any children added to their family since they arrived up there. Especially any evidence of twins."

"Can do," the Modesto sergeant said.

After he finished the conversation Virgil left his office and went out for one more look at the abandoned house. He stayed inside it for more than an hour, making an almost microscopic examination of the drawings that had first attracted his attention. He satisfied himself that three children, apparently of different ages, had made them.

Child number one had been the oldest, but the drawings, eight of them, were also the simplest and the most repetitive. Child number two had had a less steady hand, but more imagination. Tibbs traced six of the drawings to his or her hand, and no two of them were similar. Child number three appeared to have been the youngest since the drawings he or she had made were the lowest on the wall. They were also the most varied and showed, on Tibbs' second examination, evidence of talent.

Despite the crudity of the draftsmanship, the third child had painstakingly tried to add background, drawing a horizontal line to suggest ground level in one instance and adding what was obviously the sun in another. A third drawing showed experimentation; when a first attempt to draw a symmetrical figure had failed, the child artist had added lines until there were many arms and legs, and even the torso had a multiplicity of wavy outlines.

Virgil returned late to his office to find two messages. One of them was a report that had come in from Modesto by teletype, the other was a penciled note from Diane Stone, the chief's secretary, that Chief McGowan would like to see him when he came in.

He put in a call to the chief's office, but McGowan had already left. Virgil was glad of that because there were still some loose ends to tie up before he went upstairs. Since the chief had sent for him personally, it did not require much deductive ability to know what was on the chief's mind.

A welfare report he had been waiting for was on his desk. From it he learned that the De Fuentes family had come from a small village in Mexico. That was a setback since it meant that his

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chances of getting accurate birthdates and related information were close to nil. Fortunately, there were other routes of inquiry.

Tibbs went home to his apartment and stretched out to rest. He wanted an expensive dinner, but it was his superstition to hold off splurging while he was still closing a case. There was still one very sticky fact to be established and while he was by that time reasonably confident, it still had to be rated as a long shot.

In the morning he visited the public school where some of the De Fuentes children had been enrolled. He did not trouble the office for official records, interviewing instead some teachers who had been on the faculty when the Fuentes children had attended the school. The first three he spoke with could not help him much; one was resentful that he was there at all. "You haven't got any business prying into those peoples' lives," she told him. "You ought to be ashamed; you're a black man yourself and here you're trying to put down other people who have been discriminated against all their lives."

The gymnasium instructor was the one who came through. "I do remember the De Fuentes children very well," he told Virgil. "I was interested in them because one of the boys, Felipe, had remarkable athletic ability and exceptional reflexes. I think he could have made it all the way to the big time if he had really worked at it. But he showed no interest in baseball or basketball."

"Do you remember if he had any particularly close friends at school?" Tibbs asked.

"Yes, he did—several, as a matter of fact."

"May I have some names?"

"Yes, and you can get the addresses in the office if you need them. Willie Fremont, Cliff Di Santo, Trig Yamamoto, and—oh, yes, there was a girl too—Elena Morales."

By two in the afternoon Virgil Tibbs had determined that three of the families had moved away, but he had two forwarding addresses. He succeeded in locating the Yamamoto boy where he was working in the vegetable department of a supermarket. By a little after four he had found and also talked to the Morales girl who was a winsome little beauty and highly intelligent. She supplied him with the final data that he needed.

He went back to the office and called Mrs. Stone, to say that he was in if the chief still wanted to see him.

McGowan did. Virgil walked into the boss's office and sat down. When Diane handed him a cup of coffee, with cream and sugar

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exactly to his taste, he understood that he might be there for a little while.

"Virgil," the chief said, "I have a rather personal interest in the case you're working on—the child remains found during the freeway construction. Have you been able to make any progress?"

"I believe so, sir."

Captain Wilson appeared at the door and the chief filled him in.

"How much have you got, Virgil?" the captain asked.

"Since I'm not in court yet, and I don't have to provide absolute proof," Tibbs answered, "I can tell you that it's a case of premeditated murder. So far I can name the victim, give the time of death, and supply the motive. If all goes well, by tomorrow night I should have enough solid evidence for an indictment."

"Virgil," the chief said, "you never cease to amaze me. Instead of waiting for your report, suppose you bring us up to date now."

"All right, sir." Tibbs relaxed and enjoyed a little of his coffee.

"The preliminary work was quite simple," he began. "I located the plot, got the history of the dwelling that had been on it, and inspected the house itself. Fortunately it hadn't been destroyed, because there was quite a bit of evidence there, notably a series of children's drawings which were especially helpful."

"Children's drawings?" the chief queried.

"Yes, in fact they provided the essential clue when I finally had sense enough to see it. I completely missed it the first time."

"You must be slipping," the chief said.

"Undoubtedly, sir. Anyhow, without going into unnecessary details, I checked out the history of the house and satisfied myself that the most recent residents had all had one thing in common—no children were ever known to be on the premises during their tenure. There was a period of vacancy when children might have gone into the house to play, but I couldn't find any evidence to support that idea. It was also possible that someone could have taken a child there with criminal intent, but the available missing-persons reports tended to reduce the odds on that.

"So I focused my attention on a large Mexican family that had occupied the house about five years ago. There were nine children, ranging from a boy of fourteen to a one-year-old infant. I'm now satisfied that three of these children made the drawings I found on the walls of the second bedroom. Offhand I would fix their ages at about ten, nine, and eight, with the youngest the most talented of the three."

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"That's interesting, I'm sure," Wilson said, "but where is it leading us?"

"Into proof of murder."

"You have my attention," the chief said.

"Consider first the fact that there were nineteen drawings and that they were done by three different children. There you have definite evidence of lack of family discipline. It was a rental property, but no regard was given to the rights of the owner —otherwise the children would have been restrained from drawing all over the walls of what was evidently their bedroom. And there was no indication of any effort whatever to remove the drawings when the family left. So we may conclude that the family in question was at the best irresponsible."

"I think I'm beginning to see something coming," Chief McGowan murmured.

"When this family lived in Pasadena, shortly before their departure, they had nine children. The family is now in Modesto and the latest head count is eleven."

"Which is not surprising," Captain Wilson commented.

"That's the key to the whole thing," Virgil said.

"Eleven children?"

"Exactly."

It was silent in the executive office for a few moments. Then Chief McGowan leaned forward in his chair. "I get it," he said.

Tibbs nodded. "In a neighborhood like that, sir, with all the constant comings and goings and the frequent turnover in residents, hardly anyone, even the children's playmates, can keep track of every child in a family. And I have now learned that since the family moved to Modesto, three more children have been delivered to them. The birth records are on file and I have copies coming in the mail."

"Three more children. Nine plus three are twelve. But you said the latest count was only eleven," Captain Wilson noted.

"Yes, sir. Now add to that these facts: we have a set of parents with a profusion of children. I'm not putting down large families, but the De Fuentes' family may have been blessed with more than they actually wanted. They couldn't possibly support them—they were on welfare, and the mother was constantly pregnant.

"I was turning these thoughts over in my mind when an idea hit me. What if one of those children had been particularly un-

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wanted, because of being retarded or otherwise afflicted? In most cases that wouldn't add up to murder, not by a wide margin, but here we are faced with the undisputable fact that a child of approximately eight years of age was buried under that house.

"If the child had died normally, since the family was already receiving assistance, some sort of funeral arrangements could have been made."

"Also," Captain Wilson added, "since they are Mexican, there is a good chance the family is Catholic. The obvious absence of birth-control measures would support that. If a child of theirs had died under acceptable circumstances, then they would want to have it buried in sanctified ground with the proper religious rites."

Tibbs nodded agreement. "When I re-examined the house itself," he continued, "I checked carefully for any evidence that might reveal an abnormal child. It was entirely possible, with all those children, such an unfortunate individual could be kept effectively hidden from the casual observation of the neighbors. If the child's condition was bad enough, that would have been almost automatic.

"I found what I was looking for in the drawings I described. One of them in particular. It had been done by the youngest of the three child artists and this child, as I mentioned earlier, had some artistic ability. He, or she, added touches of background and tried to make an actual picture. One of these efforts showed a child with what at first appeared to be multiple arms and legs, and a torso of wavy outlines, drawn in apparently to get the right proportions. Then I realized it wasn't that at all. First, the other drawings done by the same child exhibited no such difficulty, in fact the proportions were quite good. What the child was actually drawing was another child—"

"*Shaking!*" the chief interjected. "A spastic!"

"That's it, sir. Now I was confident that I knew why a large family might willfully dispose of one of its children. Even death by accident wouldn't call for the extreme measure of burying a child under the house. The answer was painfully apparent—a too large family with a problem child might make the terrible decision to simply get rid of it before moving on. A family leaves one location with a large brood of children; it arrives at the next one, still with a large brood—who is going to notice that one is missing?"

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"There are institutions," the chief said. "Surely they must have known that."

"Perhaps they did, but there is some indication that despite the fact the family had been on welfare for some time, it may have come to this country illegally. Also, unfortunately, there are many people to whom any kind of institution is terrifying. I believe they thought that what they planned would be simpler. Anyhow, the social worker's report on the family, which I dug out and read, lists a boy who would have been eight and a half when the family moved away. His name was Alberto. I checked with Modesto where the family is receiving assistance now. There is no Alberto. That is hard evidence. I suspect that if we confront the father with the facts we now have, he will admit to what he probably has rationalized as a mercy killing."

"I can't understand," Captain Wilson said, "how they expected to get away with it. What did they tell their other children?"

"Probably that Alberto had been taken away, or some other excuse. The older children might have been cautioned never to speak of their spastic brother in case it might harm their own images. They would understand that."

Tibbs stopped for a moment and locked his fingers tightly together as he frequently did when he was under mental stress. Then he looked up once more. "You see, sir, they *did* get away with it. The missing child died years ago—we know that—he was buried, and there he lay. No one ever raised a question so far as I have been able to learn, and I strongly doubt if anyone ever would. It was pure accident that the burial site was excavated for the new freeway, and even that could well have passed unnoticed if the skull had not rolled off the top of the load. If that truck had been half full or less when the bones were loaded, the chances are good they would never have been noticed."

Chief McGowan had one more question. "Did the social worker make any mention of an abnormal child in her report?"

Tibbs nodded. "Yes, sir, she did. But she called him an 'exceptional child,' which was the term just coming into use at that time. If the family saw the report, or was shown it, that phrase would probably not register with them, particularly since English is not their native language. I don't think, gentlemen, that we will have too much trouble in obtaining a confession."

And in that, too, he was right.

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FUNERAL MUSIC

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.

As he wrote the confession he could hear the laughter of children playing in a distant meadow.

Hydrangea bushes, deep blue and soft white, swayed in the light summer breeze outside the study windows. He bent over the steel typing table and tapped out the confession with slow precision, using only the middle finger of his right hand. From the stereo speakers mounted on wall brackets above the desk came the softly haunting strains of the Baudelin *String Suite No. 2* as the words slowly filled the sheets of cream bond paper under the printed heading: H. JOSHUA HAWES.

"Before I take my life I must write this. Paul Baudelin's second wife did not die by her own hand but by mine.

"I will not repeat at length what I established in my book, *The Life and Music of Baudelin,* and what has been confirmed for me each day of the seven years I have lived with the Master as his business manager, biographer, and shield against the blows of everyday existence. Before his first marriage he was simply one of many competent young composers in a milieu dominated by his betters—Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Hindemith, Poulenc, Milhaud.

"Then in 1947 he met Claudette and within hours he was savagely, passionately in love. And on their honeymoon in Spain that winter occurred that famous freak accident in contemporary music history—the sudden collapse of a decaying and condemned building as she happened to be walking along the street, so that within moments Mme. Claudette Baudelin was crushed beneath

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tons of rubble, and Baudelin, who had been so full of the joy of love, was desolate.

"It was the shadow of that lost love, snatched away by sudden blind chance, that filled, one might almost say obsessed, his music from that day, and lent to his compositions a fullness and poignancy, a sense of the merciless randomness of the universe. It is to the fate of Claudette that we owe the four great Symphonies, the second Suite for Strings, the cycle of Death Songs—all the major works of Baudelin's second period which established him as the foremost French composer of the generation.

"And then last year he fell in love again. He was in New York City to conduct the Philharmonic in his Third Symphony. Elana Nassour was second violinist, and her musicianship was superb. It was her rendition of the sublimely difficult passage at the end of the *lento* movement that first stirred his heart, Baudelin told me. The night after the performance of the Symphony they slept in each other's arms.

"Suddenly he was like a boy of eighteen again, this fifty-year-old titan of world music. The universe revolved around Elana and he was soaringly happy. The sense of unutterable loss that was the hallmark of his second period vanished. He almost ceased composing, and what little he wrote was no longer worth hearing. I couldn't stand to see that happen. I loved his work too much.

"And so, four months after they were married—I allowed him that much time of happiness—I mixed an overdose of sleeping pills into the thick Turkish coffee she drank each night before bed.

"I was both careful and lucky. There has been much speculation whether her death was accident or suicide, but no suggestion of murder. And in the year since her death, out of his grief at the loss of her, Baudelin has begun to compose great work again. If she had lived, the Fifth Symphony and the tone poem *La Mort de Dieu* would never have been. That is my justification.

"But it is not enough. I have come to see that no work of art is worth a human life, not even a masterpiece by Baudelin. I have committed a great wrong which can be expiated in only one way. And so I shall go upstairs and take the revolver from my night-table drawer and place the barrel in my mouth and squeeze the trigger.

"Baudelin, old friend and benefactor, do not curse my memory, I beg you."

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The string suite on the stereo came to an end and the record player shut itself off with a sharp click. He tugged the third sheet of paper out of the typewriter—it began with the words "can be expiated"—and reread the confession with infinite care.

When he was satisfied he swiveled to the oak desk and placed the final sheet of cream bond on the blotter, above the last page of a signed copy of the management contract between Paul Baudelin and H. Joshua Hawes.

And then Baudelin picked up one of the felt-tipped pens with which Hawes customarily wrote, and boldly traced the signature of H. Joshua Hawes at the end of the suicide note, deliberately permitting variations, remembering that no two signatures by the same person are ever exactly the same.

When he compared the result with Hawes's genuine signature he gave a little gasp of delight: the forged signature, he was sure, would deceive an expert. He put the contract away in a drawer, slipped the protective lid over the typewriter, and fastened the sheets of the confession together with a paper clip. He then crossed the rooms of the spacious Connecticut farmhouse they had rented for the season.

The perfect murder, he reflected, is not so difficult after all; in fact it requires far less skill than the composition of a symphony. He sprang up the staircase two steps at a time and slipped into Hawes's room without knocking.

His manager-biographer-buffer was sprawled in a wing chair with his huge belly bulging beneath his scarlet dressing gown and his slippered feet resting on the edge of the bed. On the little teakwood table beside the chair there was a water tumbler half full of thick apricot brandy. A bright-jacketed detective novel lay open on Hawes's lap.

Baudelin sauntered casually across the room until he was within one step of the night table where he knew Hawes kept his revolver.

"What's up?" Hawes glanced up half irritated and spoke in a foggy mutter.

Touching only the end of the paperclip, not the papers themselves, Baudelin set the three sheets of the suicide note on top of the book on the other's ample lap. "You might find this document more interesting than the detective story."

As Hawes began reading, Baudelin backed toward the night table and eased the drawer open noiselessly, but kept his eyes fixed

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on Hawes as his fingers hunted for the weapon. First the musicologist's mouth puckered in a whistle of amusement; then as he read more and more of the confession his face seemed to turn paste-white and his thick lips trembled in sudden terror. At the moment Hawes saw the forgery of his own signature on the last page, Baudelin snatched the revolver out of the drawer and pointed it at the other. Hawes's mouth fell open in fright and disbelief.

"Wider, please." Baudelin smiled bleakly and curled his finger around the cool metal of the trigger.

And suddenly H. Joshua Hawes began to roar with laughter. Great uncontrollable waves of mirth shook his huge frame and he rocked back and forth in the wing chair as if the revolver barrel were the most outrageously funny joke in the world. He groped blindly for the tumbler of apricot brandy, lifted the glass toward Baudelin like a salute, and gulped the drink down in a single swallow.

"Oh," he mumbled, his face dripping with sweat. "What a scheme, what an absolute love of a scheme! You were right, you know. Much better than this novel."

Baudelin was laughing too, but more quietly. He returned the revolver to the night table and shut the drawer tight. "I imitated your writing style well, no? Just the right touch of the pompous and the artificially dramatic." He was delighted at the way Hawes bit down on his lower lip at his touch of criticism. "And not only your style did I capture, but your typing touch as well! You are a trained ten-finger typist, so to match your even touch on the keyboard I typed the entire confession with my one finger."

"Clever of you," Hawes admitted. "I missed that. But you did make one very bad mistake." He folded his arms in a gesture of patronizing superiority.

Baudelin lifted his graying brows in disbelief. "And what might that be?"

"The note's too damn *long*. No one would believe it was really written by someone who was about to kill himself. It rakes up too much past history. You wrote that confession as if there were a huge audience of readers out there who'd never heard of you or Claudette or Elana, so you had to tell them everything they needed to know to follow the story. That isn't the way anyone would write a suicide note."

The composer shook his head right and left. "I disagree with

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you most profoundly. You are a former music critic for a newspaper, so your instinct is always to write so that the great audience can follow what you are saying. Besides, my friend, your style *is* long-winded, even when you write about me."

Hawes lifted himself out of the wing chair, crossed to Baudelin, and kissed him lightly on each cheek like a French dignitary awarding a medal. "I won't argue it any further. Round Number Thirteen—this is the thirteenth round, isn't it?—goes to you. I can afford to give you one round, I think. The score is now nine to four in my favor, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Nine to four," Baudelin conceded. "But you were always a good manipulator, you know, while I am simply a guileless old naif who scribbles funny marks on music paper. Should I not have what you call a handicap?"

"You old fraud," Hawes chuckled, "you're as devious as I am any day and you know it, and just as adept at the game of plotting against me as I am at plotting against you. So no handicap. The first to take eleven rounds is the winner. I'll make my move within our usual week's time and I warn you now that I plan to do something especially fiendish to repay you for this clever one."

"As you please." Baudelin shrugged. "Then I leave you to hatch your scheme in peace." With two fingertips he retrieved the confession he had drafted and silently left the room.

He could not restrain his excitement as he descended the stairs. It had worked! The look on Hawes's face as he read the confession had betrayed him. He had never seen such a look of terrified guilt in his life. It had been the sudden numbed panic of a person with a monstrous secret who without warning and beyond human expectation has been exposed. There was no other way of interpreting Hawes's reaction.

True, he had recovered quickly, but not quickly enough. H. Joshua Hawes had murdered Elana in the manner and for the reason Baudelin had written in the confession. His face had given him away, as Baudelin had been praying it would when he set this trap. What was it Hamlet had said? "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king?"

He was not sure when he had begun to suspect—four months ago, perhaps five. He had never believed his adorable Elana could have killed herself, without explanation, without leaving a note or even a hint. And he could not accept that she had died by accident, for in that case he himself must be some kind of accursed

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creature, whom no woman could love without paying with her life. And so her death had to be murder, and the only person who lived with them, the only one who could have put the sleeping pills into her Turkish coffee, was Hawes.

Like an evil god Hawes had been manipulating Baudelin's life for seven years, managing his business affairs, publishing interpretations of his music, taping their conversations for use in his books—in the maze of the musical milieu Hawes was the researcher, and Baudelin the experimental rat. He had wanted Baudelin to continue the doom-haunted works of the second period, and so Elana had to die. The only difference between the typed confession and reality was that, in fact, Hawes felt no remorse at all.

Baudelin knew he could prove none of this in a court of law, that there was no way he could make that stare of blubbering terror reappear on Hawes's face for the benefit of a judge and jury. But he didn't need a judge and jury for what he intended to do.

In the study, as sunset turned the distant hills violet and orange, he reread the confession. When he had reassured himself, he swiveled to the steel typewriter table and fed a fresh sheet of cream bond into the carriage and rewrote the third page.

". . .can be expiated in only one way. And so I shall go to the liquor cabinet and pour myself a final snifter of apricot brandy, mixed with an overdose of sleeping pills. It is at least a fitting way to die.

"Baudelin, old friend and benefactor, do not curse my memory, I beg you."

He forged Hawes's signature again at the end of the confession which now was conveniently marked with Hawes's fingerprints, and put the three sheets away in a desk drawer beneath a sheaf of sketches for a concerto. Then he took the original third sheet into the downstairs bathroom, tore the sheet into tiny bits, flushed them down the toilet, took the bottle of sleeping pills out of the medicine cabinet, brought it into the kitchen where he crushed the tablets to powder, and poured the powder into the decanter of apricot brandy. When he was finished he replaced each thing where he had found it, cleaned his work space carefully, and went back to the study to wait for the sounds of Hawes stumbling downstairs to refill his glass.

Somewhere in a distant meadow he could still hear the laughter of children playing.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Claudia E. Ruster's first story, "Halfway Canyon," appeared in our February 1974 issue. Her second story is another tale of Halfway Canyon, and we are beginning to like that place. Maybe the inhabitants are a little on the American-gothic side, but they are human to the core—Edgar-Lee-Masters types, you might say . . .

HALFWAY TRAGEDY

by CLAUDIA E. RUSTER

When they built that bridge at Halfway in the early thirties it was the longest single span in the world. High too—260 feet above the beach. What they did was, they built the bridge over the canyon where it comes out to the ocean, then made a new coast highway high up on the mountain.

That left the old road to go pretty much back to nature. Oh, the county maintains it, all right, but they don't knock themselves out. I guess the votes and taxes that come out of Halfway Canyon don't really make it worth their while. But that's okay with the people who live there. It keeps Halfway Canyon nice and private, just the way they like it. Why, looking from the bridge, you can hardly see the houses at all, the way the alders and willows and wild lilac are grown up around them.

It's a mighty bridge—spectacular, they call it in the travel guides. Tourists are forever pulling into the vista point at the north end to take pictures. Attracts them from all over the state. It attracts another kind too: suicides—about one a year . . .

Let me tell you about the Thornes. Until 1966 Will and Molly Thorne lived in Los Angeles. They had two kids and Will worked hard paying for all the things that Molly said they had to have. Worked like a son of a gun and did everything she wanted eleven months out of the year. The twelfth month he spent at Halfway, whether the rest of them came with him or not. Had to do it, he

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said, to keep from going nuts. A long time ago Will made up his mind he was going to retire to Halfway Canyon just as soon as he could. Molly's mother had a big old house up there and she was after them all the time to move in with her.

"Wants to make servants of us, is all," Molly grumbled. To Molly, Halfway was just a place to be away from. Nobody in his right mind would ever want to live there. And the old lady did need waiting on. She was 150 if she was a day, and half crippled. She'd had a woman named Dodie living with her and doing for her since back in the sixties. "Just wants to turn me into a Dodie without pay," Molly objected.

Will knew the old lady would expect some work out of them but that didn't bother him. What's a little work? All he wanted was to be there—to live at Halfway and hunt and fish, to hike the hills, to plant a garden, to—well, to breathe, dammit!

The kids grew up and went their ways. Late in his fifty-ninth year Will looked up from his desk one day and said to Molly, "Okay, babe, that does it. We're moving to Mom's."

She screamed and carried on to beat the band. But he stuck to his guns. She kept it up until she brought on a tiny bit of a heart attack. And Will was ready to back down until the doctor said it wasn't anything much except Molly was too fat and going to too many parties. Will stopped worrying then. In fact, he turned it into just one more reason they ought to be living at Halfway. However, the attack scared Molly silly, so she gave in.

They rented their house out furnished and sold off what they didn't need. They bought a snazzy new Mustang, piled their clothes into it, and headed north. It was right about Easter time and oh, it was pretty—poppies and forget-me-nots, lupin and mustard, on the hills, and on the beach, ice plant blooming scarlet all the way to the Pacific.

Unfortunately, it wasn't quite the way Will had pictured it. For instance, he never had intended to live in the same house with the old lady. What he coveted was that little cabin at the south end of her property. But Molly wouldn't hear of that; she just dug her heels in and refused.

"You got me up here to this God forsaken wilderness," she complained, "but you're not going to make me live like a Nineteenth Century peasant!" What she meant was, the little cabin didn't have all the modern conveniences it might have had. "If I've got to be a lady's maid, I'm going to be one in comfort."

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Another thing, expenses were a lot more than Will had expected. Turned out the old lady had been living on credit for I don't know how long. And when he'd finished bailing her out, there wasn't enough left for them to live on. So he didn't get to retire, after all. That burned him up, but he told himself to look at it this way: the old lady couldn't last forever.

Dodie left—well, what was the sense in having her there too?—and Molly did have quite a bit of fetching and carrying to do and she didn't like it. In fact, she didn't like any of it, but she made up her mind to stick it out at least until her mother died. Now that Will had had to use up all his money, she was determined to get all that was coming to her from the old lady. Mother and daughter had never gotten along well—too much alike, some said; their life together was sort of an armed truce. They passed their days playing canasta and gin rummy, doing crossword puzzles, and watching TV.

What the old lady loved to do more than anything in the world was to back her Jeep out of the garage and go visiting. Molly dreaded it because Mom insisted on doing the driving herself. She had one of those big floppy shower caps that ladies use when they've got their hair all fancied up, and she'd pull that down over her head, prop herself up behind the wheel on a couple of Sears, Roebuck catalogues, and take off around those curves like a bat out of hell. It absolutely unglued Molly. She'd come home with her teeth chattering, her heart pounding, and her head splitting.

They fought like cat and dog over those wild trips. Mom adored them. They acted on her like a big drink from the fountain of youth. Sitting around with old friends, yakking about remember-when and whatever-happened-to-so-and-so, took 20 years off of her. Nevertheless, when they roared back home that last time, Molly said never again.

"You're trying to kill me!" she screamed at her mother. And Molly ran to her room and locked the door. Wouldn't even say good night. Six hours later the old lady died in her sleep.

There couldn't have been an easier way for her to go, the doctor told Molly about a dozen times. No pain, no fuss, and no, your fighting with her didn't bring it on. Nothing she liked better than a good fight. Pepped her up. But the woman was 97, for pity's sake. Molly took it into her head it was her fault, though, and stewed and stewed about it.

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Will, on the other hand, was thankful. Now he could sell off the big house and all that land that was just sitting there. Worth a nice piece of money, they told him. He and Molly could live in the cabin the rest of their lives—if they did it his way. Just give Molly a little while to recover . . .

Oh, no. When Will brought up the subject, Molly, far from recovering, pulled off another heart attack. A pretty good one this time. Better not upset her, the doctor said, better just let her have it nice and peaceful and get somebody in here to wait on her days. Will gnashed his teeth and went back to work. Seemed like his dream just got further and further away. But, dammit, he meant to retire if it was the last thing he did!

In a few months the doctor said Molly was improved enough so she should start doing for herself. And especially she needed to lose weight and strengthen those heart muscles. He wanted her to walk at least two miles a day. It took a while but, little by little, she worked up to the two miles. From the house up the canyon road to the highway, on the highway to the bridge, across the bridge and back, and then home.

She got so she could do it in just under an hour and she hated every minute. Hated the exercise, hated the scenery—imagine, that sky and that ocean, the lupin and the laurel, the deer and the quail!—and most of all, she hated looking back down on the canyon road that Mom used to love to drive. Every night when Will got home, she'd grumble about it.

"I've got to get away from here," she told him. "It's driving me out of my mind. I stand up there on the bridge and try not to look. I sure don't want to look. But something makes me do it. I look down at those steep winding curves and remember how she'd whip around and we'd lurch from side to side and how she loved it and how she'd laugh—and I get sick to my stomach all over again. Sometimes, it seems like I can even *see* her! I can't take it any more. You can stay here and live in that filthy rundown shack if that's what you want, but I'm moving back to L.A."

It suddenly came to Will that was the answer to the whole thing. There hadn't been any happiness in them for a long time and he was tired of fighting her. He could never afford to buy a place of his own now—Halfway lots cost an arm and a leg by that time—but with the cabin and a little garden he could make it fine on his Social Security.

"It's a deal," he said.

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They came to an agreement: Molly would sell the big house and all but one acre around the cabin. Will would get that and the Jeep and she would take the Mustang.

"And that's all I want," Will told her. "You don't have to give me any of the money."

She let out a loud ugly laugh. "Damn right I don't have to. I don't owe you one red cent."

For a long time he just looked at her. He thought about the 40 years of their marriage. Some of it had been good. The first part was good because there was love in their home and in their hearts. But these last years had been hard.

And he thought about her mother's debts that he'd paid off, about the repairs he'd made around the place, and the taxes he'd been paying. And he thought about how he'd had to give up his dream again and again. "Don't you?" he asked her. Then he got up quickly and went outside, to keep from putting his hands around her throat right there and then.

She saw the white rage in his face and knew what he was capable of doing to her. So when he came back in she made believe she'd just been joking. We'll do it the way you say, she promised him—sell all but the cabin and one acre.

The next few weeks were almost happy. Molly was busy with her real-estate people, her L.A. phone calls, and her packing. The doctor still made her take her walks every day, but she'd even stopped bellyaching about that. Funny, she said, now she knew she didn't have to stay here, Halfway didn't look half bad.

On Will's sixty-fifth birthday he got up at 7:00 and drove the Mustang to town, same as always, but this time he only stayed long enough to pick up his final paycheck and shake hands goodbye. When he got back to the house the phone was ringing—some fellow wanting Molly.

"She doesn't seem to be here right now," Will told him. "Must be taking her walk. This is Mr. Thorne. Can I give her a message?"

"Yes. My name is Farley. I'm the broker who sold her property out there. Just want to give her the good news. The buyers have already signed the papers and put the money in escrow. How's that for fast work?"

"I'll say. And they agreed to her terms?"

"What terms?"

"About the one acre and the cabin?"

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"Oh, no, not this couple. Mrs. Thorne knew that from the beginning. These people won't buy unless they can have the entire property. Now, that first bid, the one we had the day before yesterday, those folks didn't mind, but then, you have to remember their offer was $3500 lower. So, of course, Mrs. Thorne took the higher offer."

"Of course," Will said tightly.

"Yes indeedy," sang the salesman. "Isn't that fine? All over now but the shouting. Oh, one more thing—the buyers are in kind of a hurry. So the sooner Mrs. Thorne gets in here to sign, the better, right?"

"Right, " Will said, hanging up.

In the back of his head he must have been thinking about this all along, because he went through the motions as if from memory.

He unlocked the garage, went in and took Mom's crazy shower cap down from the shelf. He pulled it over his head, backed the Jeep out, and drove up the canyon road. Fast, careening, and hurtling around the curves like a bat out of hell. Back and forth he drove until he saw Molly's body fall from the bridge. At that he turned around and drove home.

It took months to straighten everything out—Molly didn't leave a will—but the following spring Will Thorne moved into his beloved cabin.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

V. C. Stabile
Vice President and Treasurer

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THE DARK PLAN

by HUGH PENTECOST

The most irritating and difficult thing for Jason Dark, normally a right-handed man, to do was to use his left hand. He had to learn to write with it; he couldn't handle a typewriter except at a snail's pace; he was a steak eater and there was no way

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he could cut a steak, at least in public.

In the privacy of his own apartment in New York's Murray Hill district he could manage it. He could cook the steak with not too much difficulty, get it on a plate, hold it down with his plastic right hand, and cut it with the left. He could hold the steak down no matter how hot it was, because, of course, there was no feeling in the plastic hand. And he was getting more skillful, day by day, at cutting with his left hand.

There were other small but irritating problems. He had always carried his change in his right-hand trouser pocket, his bills in the left. Now everything had to go in the left-hand pocket. He couldn't manage so simple a thing as a belt. He had to have buttons put on his slacks so that he could wear suspenders. It took him a long time to get the suspenders attached to the slacks, but that could be done in private.

He couldn't manage a necktie so he began wearing turtleneck knit shirts, most of them navy-blue or black. Cleaning his wire-rimmed, slightly tinted glasses was an awkward business.

He had to wear his shoulder holster under his right arm instead of his left. It was an exercise in futility. When his right hand had existed he could shoot out a snake's eye at 50 feet. Left-handed, he'd told himself bitterly, he couldn't hit a cow with a handful of rice.

The worst part of it in the early days was that each minor difficulty recalled the memory of the horror. There was the man in the black ski-mask, speaking in his muffled voice. There was the vision of his own right hand, strapped to the butcher's block in the deserted restaurant kitchen. There was the agony of the blow on his hand with the flat side of the meat cleaver, the pain of shattered bones. And then he could hear the man in the ski-mask, shouting in a kind of maniacal rage when Dark still refused to answer questions, then the meat cleaver chopping his hand into bloody shreds. He could hear his own screaming. He had no absurd hero's pride about taking pain stoically. It helped to scream, helped to hear it.

Then he remembered coming to in the park where the torturer had dumped him, the young couple running wildly away from him, having seen the bloody nothing that had once been a hand as Dark reached out to them for help. He could still feel the tourniquet on his arm, placed there by the policeman who swore and swore, almost in shock, as he took Dark to the hospital where the

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amputation was completed, made to look neat.

It was the end of a way of life for Jason Dark. He had passed his fiftieth birthday. For 22 years he had been on the police force, rising in rank from patrolman to detective. For five years—until the night they worked on his hand—he had been a private investigator. He was a short rotund man, who looked more like a school-teacher, with his wire-rimmed glasses, than a cop. But he'd had the reputation of being a tough cookie—thorough, disciplined, but tough.

Now he had to begin a new way of life. One-handed he couldn't fight anyone, couldn't handle a gun, offensively or defensively. But violence simmered like a soup on the back burner of his mind.

One of the attributes that had made Jason Dark a good cop and a better-than-good private operator was his ability to make decisions objectively—without any interference from his emotions. He never made a move out of pity; not that he couldn't feel pity. He never made a move out of anger; not that he couldn't feel anger. He moved, on a case, only as fast as the facts permitted, never by the emotional desire to hurry the payoff on his own behalf, or to satisfy a client.

Jason Dark was going to destroy a man for what had happened to his hand. But the man he was after was not the man in the ski-mask who had actually engineered the mutilation and torture. The man in the ski-mask was simply a weapon used by someone else. It was a waste of energy and time to hate ski-mask and to hunt him down. You don't hate a weapon—a gun, or a knife, or a meat cleaver. You hate the man who uses the weapon against you.

Jason Dark's target was far beyond the man in the ski-mask, beyond him and above him in the echelons of power. And it was a far more complex plan than the simple business of an eye for an eye, a hand for a hand. It would have been easy enough to set some sort of booby trap. The price of a hit man or a bomb expert to knock off a man was well within Dark's means at today's prices in a violent world.

Jason Dark had been forced to answer a question for himself. Death for the king of an empire was too simple. The only real punishment for the king would be to destroy his empire, to shatter his power. Could one man, a one-handed man, destroy an empire more powerful than many governments, an empire with ar-

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mies and wealth greater than most men could realistically imagine?

Jason Dark thought he could. With patience and care and cunning he thought he could.

The door read: *Evans Secretarial Service*. Dark, carrying a large brown-leather suitcase, came off the elevator on the fourth floor of the Chrysler Building, walked straight to the door of the office, and went in, as if he were a frequent visitor. He had looked over the door from the outside the day before, but this was the first time he'd gone inside.

A young attractive girl was seated at a typewriter desk, her fingers flying over the keyboard. She gave Dark a cheerful smile but went right on working. Unmarred, unspoiled, he thought, like girls in his nostalgic past. She was golden blonde, her hair hanging loose around her shoulders. She came to a stopping place and her smile widened.

"Can I help you?" she asked. Nice voice.

Dark glanced at an unmarked door to the right of the girl's desk. "I'd like to speak to the boss, if I may," he said.

She laughed. "I'm the boss, the help, the messenger service," she said. "I am It. That door leads to a coat closet."

"Evans Secretarial Service?"

"Sharon Evans," she said.

"Well, Miss Evans, I picked you out in the Yellow Pages, mostly because you're close to my home base on Fortieth Street." That wasn't why he had chosen her, but she could not know that. He put down the suitcase and held out his black plastic hand. "This is quite recent," he said. "I haven't learned to write too well with my left hand and typing with one finger of one hand is a disaster." He braced himself against the pity he saw in her blue eyes and the self-pity that tended to produce. "Can you transcribe from tapes, Miss Evans? I have a bagful of tapes here."

"No problem," she said.

He lifted the suitcase to her desk and began fumbling at the catches with his stubborn left hand.

"Let me," Sharon Evans said, and she opened the case.

"There are fifty half-hour tapes there," Dark said. "How long—?"

"With the commitments I have you'll have to give me a week," Sharon Evans said. "You see, there's just me."

"A week's fine. I'm in no hurry," Dark said. He gave his name,

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his address on 40th Street, his telephone number.

"Sixty-five cents a page," she said.

"Fair enough. Let me know when it's done, Miss Evans. And thank you."

On the sixth day after that, in the late afternoon, Sharon Evans, carrying the leather suitcase, rang the doorbell of Jason Dark's apartment. He opened the door, his sandy hair slightly rumpled, his eyes blinking behind the tinted glasses as though he'd been asleep.

"Forgive me for coming here, Mr. Dark," the girl said, "but I'm fascinated by this material."

"Oh, really? Come in, Miss Evans."

The room she found herself in had a pleasant, warm feeling for Sharon Evans. It was lined with bookcases that were crammed with books. There was a large flat-topped desk littered with papers, clippings from newspapers, letters, notebooks. The faded Persian rug was a museum piece, she thought. There was a sofa, two overstuffed armchairs, and an elaborate radio with shortwave and overseas bands on it.

"You have given me a whole new view of life, Mr. Dark," Sharon said. "Oh, I've read about multinational corporations and conglomerates, but I never dreamed they were so powerful!"

He waved her to a chair. "These multinational corporations have more impact on people than most sovereign governments," he said. "They make daily business decisions that influence where people will live, what they will eat, drink, and wear, what sort of knowledge schools and colleges will encourage, and what kind of society our children will inherit."

"But they are so *big*!"

He smiled at her. She was like a bright-eyed little girl being told a fairy story by her grandfather. "General Motors is bigger than Switzerland, Pakistan, and South Africa put together," he said. "Dutch Shell is bigger than Iran, Venezuela, and Turkey. Goodyear Tire is bigger than Saudi Arabia."

"And this Quadrant International you're writing about?"

"Bigger than any two of the big ones," Dark said.

She sat forward in her chair. "Who is going to publish your book, Mr. Dark?"

"Book?"

"What I've just finished typing for you."

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"Oh, I hadn't thought of it as a book. Just a record for myself."

"Mr. Dark, you've got a gold mine here!" She brought her hand down on the suitcase. "Do you have an agent?"

"An agent? Oh, you mean a literary agent. No, I hadn't thought of—"

She leaned forward and covered his left hand with hers. "Jason, I have a very good connection with Tyler and Shane, one of the best publishers of nonfiction in the country. Could I show them a copy of your book? I'm sure they'll snap it up."

"Oh, I don't know, Sharon," he said. She had used his first name first.

"It would be a great feather in my cap if I could bring Paul Tyler a best-seller," she said. "Please, Jason!"

"Well, if you want to," he said. "Only I must say I think you're overrating it. I mean, who could possibly care about Quadrant International?"

"The whole world will care when they've read it," Sharon said. She had jumped up and was opening the suitcase. "May I take the top copy?"

After Sharon had left, Jason Dark smiled to himself. He had chosen Sharon Evans to transcribe the tapes, not because her office was close to his apartment, but because he was certain she would want to take the manuscript to Tyler & Shane, Inc. The result could be the opening up of a considerable can of worms.

Three days later, just as Jason Dark was having his first cigarette of the morning along with his second cup of coffee, his phone rang. A secretarial voice told him that his caller was Mr. Paul Tyler of Tyler & Shane, Inc.

"Mr. Dark? I'm Paul Tyler. I suspect you know who I am."

"Well, yes," Dark said. "Sharon Evans told me. When would you like me to pick up the manuscript?"

"Pick it up! My dear Mr. Dark, I very much hope you will *not* pick it up. I found it simply fascinating. I think we are going to want to publish it and make you a very famous man."

"Do you really mean it?" Dark made it sound as though he was overwhelmed.

"My partner, Patrick Shane, is reading the book right now," Tyler said. "I know he's going to be as enthusiastic as I am. We'd like our lawyer to go over it to make certain there is no possibility of libel, then we'll have to draw up a contract. Today is Tues-

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day. Will you come in, say, Thursday morning at ten o'clock, and we'll suggest a deal?"

"Well, yes, of course."

"I notice there is no title on the book," Tyler said. "What would you think of *The Earth Managers*?"

"That certainly describes the operations of Quadrant International," Dark said.

"See you Thursday," Tyler said, "and I look forward to meeting you."

Ten minutes later his phone rang again. It was Sharon, very excited. "Jason! Isn't it marvelous?"

"I have to admit I was surprised."

"Can I come to see you after work—say six o'clock? We must celebrate!"

She arrived at five minutes past six, glowing, and carrying a bottle of champagne. "I've had it in the office cooler since lunchtime. Oh, Jason, I love you!" she said.

He looked at the bottle. His mouth tightened. "I'm afraid I can't open it," he said.

"I know that, you idiot, of course you can't. I've always thought women were cheated of the pleasure it must be to pop a champagne cork."

She popped it. She poured. She offered a toast to a "new millionaire author" and they drank. Then she put her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. "I really do love you, Jason," she said softly.

He pulled away. The champagne was dry and stimulating. "Don't be absurd," he said. "I am old enough to be your father."

"My sweet Jason, what on earth does age have to do with it?"

Quite a bit later Jason Dark had to admit to himself that age had absolutely nothing on earth to do with it.

Thursday morning, ten o'clock.

Jason Dark, wearing a black turtleneck shirt, a gray tweed sports jacket and gray slacks, was in Paul Tyler's office at Tyler & Shane's. Paul Tyler looked strangely forbidding on that Thursday morning. He was suntanned, conservatively dressed, and scowling at his partner, Patrick Shane, who was quite different. Shane was blond, his clothes were very mod, and his smile was ingratiating. He had a rather bothersome stutter that somehow added to his charm.

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"I'm p-pleased to m-meet you, Mr. D-Dark," he said. "B-but sorry it should b-be under these circumstances."

"Pat feels we cannot publish your book, Mr. Dark," Tyler said grimly.

"Oh?"

"I disagree entirely," Tyler said, "and we've had a rather serious quarrel over it. But Pat has persuaded some of our stockholders to go along with him and they've tied my hands. I'm sorry, really sorry."

Shane gave his shoulders a deprecating little shrug. "Quite f-frankly, Mr. D-Dark," he said, "we'd be sued out of our shoes by Quadrant International."

"I'm sorry to have raised your hopes, Mr. Dark," Tyler said, "and I'll be glad to help you find a publisher who isn't as chicken as we seem to be."

"It's n-not a matter of b-being chicken," Shane said, apology in his voice. "Quadrant International could p-put us out of b-business overnight if they chose."

"Our lawyer still has your manuscript, Mr. Dark," Tyler said. "I'll have it delivered to you late today or tomorrow morning. Again, I'm deeply sorry."

Dark nodded, turned, and walked slowly out of Tyler's office, his shoulders drooping. Tyler, watching him go, could not have guessed that Jason Dark's eyes were very bright behind the tinted glasses, and that he was smiling as if he were pleased.

Jason Dark dawdled on the way home, window shopping. He spent a considerable time looking at the lingerie and negligees in the window of a smart boutique. He wondered if he had the taste to buy just the right thing for Sharon Evans. Eventually he discussed with a saleswoman the proper thing for "his daughter who was going on her honeymoon."

There was considerable sly humor before he went away with a white lace see-through nightgown. If he had made the choice himself, he might have bought black, but the saleswoman persuaded him that white was the wiser choice.

Sharon was sitting outside the door of his apartment, in tears. Tyler had phoned her to tell her the news. Dark tried to comfort her while he fumbled for the key in his left-hand trouser pocket.

He finally got the door open and they went in. Sharon's voice rose in a little scream.

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Jason Dark's apartment was a shambles. Hundreds of books had been taken out of the bookcases and scattered on the floor. Furniture had been overturned, filing cabinets ransacked. Without bothering to check, Jason Dark knew what would be missing—the carbons of the manuscript Sharon had typed and the tapes she had transcribed.

He watched silently while Sharon, now familiar with his apartment, searched. A tiny smile moved the corners of his mouth. She was so young, so lovely, so quick to become enthusiastic, so quick to give in to despair.

"All gone, Jason!" she said finally, looking like a small child about to burst into tears. "Thank God that Paul Tyler still has the master copy."

"I doubt very much if he'll be able to return it to us," Dark said. "I'm afraid the lawyer for Tyler and Shane will discover that his copy of the manuscript has been stolen."

"Jason!"

"Would you make us a pot of coffee, my sweet?" he asked. "Then I'll acquaint you with some of the facts of my life."

They sat facing each other in the two overstuffed armchairs, she leaning forward eagerly, he leaning back, holding his coffee cup in his left hand.

"I have used you," he said bluntly.

She smiled at him. "My pleasure," she said.

"You should dislike me for it," he said, "though I hope you won't. You see, *I picked you out very carefully to transcribe my* tapes. I knew of your connection with Paul Tyler and I was sure you'd offer to take my manuscript to him when you'd finished it."

"But why not, Jason? It's a marvelous exposé."

"I've been working on this case a long time, Sharon. You see, Quadrant International is responsible for this." He held out his black plastic hand. "I was convinced someone at Tyler and Shane had connections with Quadrant International. I was certain that when that someone read the manuscript Quadrant International would be promptly notified."

"But, Jason, they've destroyed your book, your tapes."

"Not quite. There is another set of tapes," he said.

"Where?"

"It would be too dangerous for you to know," he said. "You might be visited by a man in a black ski-mask."

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"But what good will this do you, Jason?"

"Time will tell," he said. "Now would you please help me put this apartment together again?"

Three days later someone was pounding on the door of Jason Dark's apartment. He opened the door to find Sharon standing there, her eyes wide.

"Have you heard the news, Jason?" It was almost a whisper.

"What news?" he asked.

"Patrick Shane has committed suicide. It was on the radio."

"Well, well," Dark said. "Come in, Sharon."

A cleaning woman had found Patrick Shane in his Park Avenue apartment, his brains blown out, the gun lying on the floor beside him. There was no suicide note. His business associates could offer no reason for what Shane had done. He was well off, a success in business, living an apparently happy life.

Dark poured Sharon a drink.

"Since this may be the last time you will want to see me," he said, "I think I should tell you that Shane did not commit suicide."

"But, Jason—"

"Listen," he said. He walked over to his desk on which a small tape recorder rested and switched it on. The tape ran for a second or two, then a cold hard voice said, "So what is your proposition, Mr. Shane?"

"One m-million d-dollars d-down payment paid to me in c-cash." The voice was unmistakably Patrick Shane's. "F-fifty thousand a year retainer. A b-bonus for any information about Quadrant when it p-proves valuable. N-no b-bargaining. That's it."

Dark switched off the recorder. "So you see, Sharon, Patrick Shane was murdered by an agent of Quadrant International. It appears Shane betrayed Quadrant."

"But, Jason, where did you get that tape?"

"I said it 'appears' he betrayed them," Dark said. He smiled at Sharon. "I didn't 'get' that tape. I made it." His smile widened. "I've always b-been p-pretty good as a m-mimic."

"Jason!"

"I sent the tape to someone higher up in the chain of command at Quadrant. His response was the murder of Patrick Shane, and that tells me what I need to know to take the next step toward the man at the top."

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"You're going to fight Quadrant International all by yourself?"

"I am fighting Quadrant International all by myself," Dark said.

"Who is the man at the top?" she asked.

"I don't know yet. But after the next move, or the next, I may see his face at the end of the tunnel."

"I'm going with you," she said.

"I have just told you that I've killed a man, even though I was sitting in this room when he was shot," Dark said.

She came out of her chair and knelt in front of him. She took his hand, the one that had feeling in it, lifted it to her lips, then looked up at him, her eyes bright.

"What's our next move, Jason?" she asked.

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Under the surface was a growing chaos . . .

UNDER THE SURFACE

by BABETTE ROSMOND

When my mother died, I was very young,
And my father sold me, while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry, "weep! weep! weep! weep!
So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep."

—*The Chimney Sweeper,* SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Mamie had never read William Blake, or anything else except directions for the subway and slips of folded lined paper reading: "Sent to . . . Interviewed by . . . References . . ." The slips were given to her by a new employment agency, any agency she happened to walk by when she needed work.

She came to the Evanses one winter morning just after Christmas when tree decorations were beginning to drop and the tree needles were browning. She was dressed in a plain brown woolly coat, a pink scarf, a knitted cap, and she carried a large brown purse that looked like a schoolbag.

"Yes'm," she said, eyes downcast, as Mrs. Evans talked to her about the job. Some washing, no ironing, just mostly cleaning, be very careful of the "good" table, change beds on Monday, and so on. Yes, Mamie said, she could certainly stay and cook a simple meal so the Evanses would come home from their offices to a little hot dinner.

No, Mamie said, she would not be eating in the kitchen at the same time because most people didn't eat what she ate. Why was that? Because she couldn't stand the thought of the way the animals looked when maybe just before they were killed they *looked* at you with their soft eyes and it did not seem right, just not right, to eat anything that was so—

"Yes," said Mrs. Evans, "I understand." She knew she didn't

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understand, but it was a quick emotional response and Mamie's eyes, as she spoke so earnestly, portrayed truly the subject of her sermon.

"Yes," said Mamie, "I know all about housework. I did for Mrs. Smith until she got sick and went to the hospital. I know all about keeping things nice."

"Well, you must certainly have something to eat while you're here," said Mrs. Evans. "After all, six hours is a long time. Make yourself a sandwich, or have some eggs, or—"

"I don't bother much with bread," said Mamie. She was small and serious and shy. "I'll find something, don't worry."

"You have such a nice soft speech," said Mrs. Evans. "Are you from Georgia?"

"From North Carolina," said Mamie. "I just come up last year, that when I go to Mrs. Smith, and I know how to do things right."

Mrs. Evans looked at the employment-agency slip. "Is this Mrs. Smith's number?" she asked, pointing to a notation on the back.

"Yes, but I think Mrs. Smith she's still like in the hospital and she wanted me to take over, she said, take over the whole house-*keep*ing, but I don't think she there now. But the agency lady know me."

Mrs. Evans was a woman in a perpetual rush. Even on weekends, reading the Sunday papers, there was a kind of pressure around her, a little aura of must-do, will-do, have-done.

"I think we'll work it out," she said now, pleasantly. "I'll call the agency and you can figure to start tomorrow, if you like. Do you have a home phone to give me?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mamie, and put down a number laboriously, wetting the pencil point like a schoolchild.

"You look so young," said Mrs. Evans, half to herself.

"I'm twenty-three," said Mamie. "I know how to do things."

"Do you live with your family?"

"Yes, ma'am. I live with my brother and his wife. My brother he's very strict. He don't like me to be out when it dark, so I'd like to get out real early. You got some lovely flowers there. They roses?"

"Yes, they are," said Mrs. Evans. "And those over there in that vase are dried flowers. I did them last year."

"My, isn't that something," said Mamie. "You mean they just dry out and look so pretty? That something I never heard of. They are real pretty. . ."

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When Mamie set the table for the Evanses' early dinner the next evening, there were two unmatching forks, no knives, one tablespoon, and one plate. The tea was brought in cups resting on salad plates.

"Mamie," said Mr. Evans. "A cup goes on a saucer. There's a special plate called a saucer. It has a ring in the middle for the cup."

"I never saw that before," said Mamie. "It fit right in there. Everybody have a different way of doing things. This is nice, because one thing is *supposed* to be right there where it is. That makes a difference, don't it?" Then Mamie shifted to her rapid speech; she alternated between that and her very slow, slurred speech. "You mind about the lights?" she asked Mrs. Evans.

"Lights?"

"Yes, like when you come in tonight you notice all the lights was on? That so I don't have to be in the dark. I afraid of the dark."

Mrs. Evans laughed. "Oh, Mamie, you *are* a child."

Mamie kept her eyes downcast as she took away the cup, holding it firmly on its saucer. "Yes," she said. "That what my brother say."

It turned out that Mamie could only cook what she had cooked before, which was rice. So the three days a week that Mamie came in, Mrs. Evans wrote long manuscripts including instructions about how to broil a chicken, how to prepare a simple casserole, how to set the table (she drew a picture), how to fix tea so that it wasn't jet-black by the time it was served.

"We're lucky," said Mr. Evans one evening after Mamie had gone home ("Well, good night, Mr. and Mrs. Evans, I got to get on my way and-catch-my-train-it-don't-wait"). The train was the subway, but Mamie never used that word. "She's a child, and so willing to learn."

"And so sweet," said Mrs. Evans. She refolded some of the laundry and put the mantel ornaments back where they belonged. Mamie redecorated with each dusting.

"Look at this," said Mr. Evans. He pointed to a folded tissue on his desk. In the very center of it was a shiny dime. "I must have dropped it on the floor. Or maybe she made a phone call. She certainly is an honest one!"

Then one Monday Mamie didn't appear. Mrs. Evans was worried and called the number Mamie had given her; a recording said

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the number had been disconnected. Then Mrs. Evans phoned the agency and tried to find out where Mamie could be reached. The agency lady didn't know.

By Thursday morning Mrs. Evans was upset, not so much because of the inconvenience but because she was afraid to think of Mamie wandering in search of her train, perhaps assaulted or lured . . .

Mamie telephoned that night.

"My goodness, Mamie, we were so worried," said Mrs. Evans. "The agency too! Where on earth were you?"

"Well, I had your business number, Mrs. Evans, but I forgot to write down the home phone and anyway when I got to where I had to go it cost so much to telephone, like long distance, that kind of thing—"

"You should have reversed the charges," began Mrs. Evans, and then realized this was like speaking in Latin. "I mean, there's a way of telling the operator—" She tried to simplify the concept of long-distance telephoning, collect.

"Well, that's news to me," said Mamie. "See, my uncle he up and died and our grief was something awful and my brother and I we caught the bus? and we went on straight to Carolina? and we got there just in time and you know something, that mean sister-in-law, that sister-in-law of mine, she just wouldn't bother herself to go. She let us go all alone, and to add to that we was so upset besides, you know? But I be back tomorrow."

Mr. and Mrs. Evans discussed Mamie's innocence. "Imagine not even knowing how to telephone collect," said Mrs. Evans. "She's a—a natural. She isn't really meant for the world today. But I'm so glad she's back." She thought a moment. "I'm doubly glad. Because, you know, she has a key. I'd hate to think of our key floating around—"

"Well, if all the keys we gave to all the cleaning women we've had were ever used," said Mr. Evans, "the door would be covered with locks. No sense worrying about that. You either trust somebody or you don't."

"Well, if there's one person I trust," said Mrs. Evans, "it's Mamie. Can you just imagine Mamie being a master criminal!"

"A desperate, international leader of a ring of thieves," agreed Mr. Evans, going back to his newspaper, full of the long and dreary annals of a metropolis betrayed.

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"Why, Mamie," said Mrs. Evans, a few nights later. "This is excellent cole slaw. What a nice surprise."

"Yes," said Mamie, in the grave logical way in which a child accepts a compliment.

"Is there something else you do so well?"

"No," said Mamie. "I just know how to do cole slaw. I always know that, it seems."

The Evanses agreed that she was coming along well. The furniture stopped looking as if poltergeists had been at it, the meat was properly timed (Mrs. Evans had taken to drawing a little clock on her list of instructions to let Mamie know how long something should cook) and Mr. Evans' tea now resembled tea instead of licorice juice.

The Evanses discussed sending Mamie to night school. "She's really so intelligent," said Mr. Evans. "She probably wants to make something of herself, and she could go a few evenings a week for simple—"

"What? Mamie?" laughed Mrs. Evans. "It's still dark when she leaves here. She runs right to that train. But you're right—maybe in the spring, when the evenings are still light."

On a Wednesday evening Mrs. Evans got off her bus and walked toward the apartment. She looked up, expecting to see as always the windows framing brilliant light against whatever ghosts frightened Mamie; but the windows were dark. She frowned. Her first thought was that Mamie had been ill and had forgotten the business telephone number and the careful instructions about reversing charges.

Mrs. Evans rode up in the self-service elevator with her next-door neighbor. They bid each other good night and Mrs. Evans let herself in. The door was unlocked. It should not have been.

The light was on in the hall. There had been no light on in the morning when Mrs. Evans left.

The light was also on in the kitchen and in a little hall off the back door.

Mrs. Evans, like every other city woman in America, had been brainwashed in every possible way: books, magazines, newspapers, TV, radio, friends, neighbors. The dangers of rushing into an unlocked (when it should have been locked) apartment with the wrong lights on were perfectly clear to her. She called, "Mamie, Mamie," through the small apartment, but there was no sign of

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anything but unswept floors and unmade beds.

Mrs. Evans wondered what she should do. Suppose, on Mamie's way to work, she had been hurt in some way. There was no way of reaching Mamie's brother through a telephone number that didn't exist.

Automatically Mrs. Evans took off her wrist watch and lifted the lid of her jewelry box to put it away.

The little velvet compartments were mostly empty. A few scattered things remained, but the small treasures of a lifetime had vanished.

At first she could not take it in. She walked rapidly to the front door and back, calling Mamie. Then she looked to see if anything else was missing. Nothing had been touched except her past, all relics of personal occasions: a bracelet given her by her husband when they were engaged, a necklace bought when she had sold a TV script, all oddments of a particular life, all precious only to her, including a gold-link bracelet that spelled out Eleanor. What could Mamie do with a bracelet that said Eleanor?

But it took Mrs. Evans a while to realize that the thief was Mamie. Not until her husband came home, and not until the police arrived, did it become clear that only Mamie had the key. And then it was confirmed by the day doorman that Mamie had arrived at her usual time, but had left after a few minutes.

"Left with the loot," said the very young policeman writing out his report.

"Have your lock changed," said his partner.

The very young one looked sympathetically at Mrs. Evans. "Yeah," he said, "have your lock changed and then give the new key to a new cleaning woman!"

Mrs. Evans smiled wryly, as he had meant her to, but later she felt a terrible sense of depression. What had happened? Why did Mamie wait for a dull cloudy Wednesday to commit a silly robbery that would net her about a week's pay if she tried to sell the small pieces of gold?

"Her brother wasn't her brother," said Mrs. Evans angrily to her husband. "He was threatening her! The woman she called her sister-in-law—she was his other girl, and they must have told Mamie to get out because she wasn't bringing in enough—"

But Mrs. Evans had to stop. The image of Mamie in her little brown coat, with her knitted scarf and hat and her neat oxfords, kept interfering with the fantasies of life beneath the surface.

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The police said they hoped the stuff was insured (it wasn't) and that they'd look for Mamie, but they doubted the jewelry would ever turn up. The Evanses doubted it too.

"But who *could* we trust?" Mrs. Evans kept saying, and Mr. Evans answered, "When she gets home and they find they can't get much for the stuff, I hope they don't beat her."

"Or lock her in the dark somewhere," said Mrs. Evans. "Remember, she's so afraid of the dark." But then she fixed her mouth in a determined line. "I'm mad," she said. "I'm mad, and I want my things back and—"

There seemed nothing else to say. No words could halt the terror building up within them.

Under the surface of their life was a changing world. And like everyone else they were beginning to be afraid to face the future.

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a *NEW* **Photographer story by**

JAMES HOLDING

The word murder does not exist in Manuel Andradas' vocabulary. The Photographer prefers a gentler, a more genteel word—like nullification. Although an assassin for hire, The Photographer has his little scruples, his little delicacies of language. No apprentice artisan, this paid killer—no, he's an artist in both of his professions. The question is: can the heart of such a man have human feelings? Compassion? Gratitude? . . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER: LISBON ASSIGNMENT

by JAMES HOLDING

On this occasion his instructions were to meet Rodolfo at the flower market on Rua da Ouvidor. The sun was high. Fleecy clouds drifted across a summer sky, casting occasional moving shadows on the slopes of Corcovado. The rich heavy odors of tropical blooms scented the air around him. Manuel Andradas leaned against a lamppost and waited without impatience, hitching comfortably at the camera case slung over his shoulder.

If Rodolfo had another name, Manuel did not know it. Yet because Rodolfo was his usual contact in Rio with The Big Ones, The Corporation, he knew him well by sight. Thus, when Rodolfo emerged from a flower stall nearby, Manuel nodded silently and followed him along the narrow sidewalk.

At a small café on the edge of the flower market they faced each other over a *cafezhino*. Manuel kept his muddy eyes on his tiny coffee cup.

Rodolfo said softly, "Photographer, would you like a little trip?"

Manuel shrugged.

"To Lisbon," Rodolfo amplified, "a truly beautiful city."

"Not as beautiful as Rio." Manuel sipped his coffee. "But in-

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teresting, I agree." He put down his cup. "When? Is there a deadline?"

"Before the first of the month. Any time until then."

A spark of animation showed in Manuel's expression, although he did not lift his eyes to Rodolfo. "The price?" he asked.

"Half a million cruzeiros."

Manuel sucked in his breath. "Your client must be anxious."

"Is the price satisfactory?"

"For the first time in our association," said Manuel, "I can answer 'yes' to that. It is a generous price." He paused. "Still, as I must go to Lisbon . . ."

Rodolfo lifted his lip in what passed with him for a smile. "I presume you are asking for expense money besides?"

Manuel spread protesting hands. "It is a costly trip."

Rodolfo shook his head. "You pay your own expenses. After all, half a million is enough to make you the richest photographer in Rio." He laughed, a harsh grating sound without humor.

"Then I'll need an advance."

"One-third now. The rest when you present proof that your journey has been—ah—successful."

"*Va bem,*" Manuel said. "Who is it this time?"

The man called Rodolfo scratched with a pencil on the back of the café menu. He turned the menu toward Manuel. On it he had written a name and address.

The Photographer automatically committed them to memory, then folded the menu, tore it into small pieces, and dropped the scraps into the side pocket of his dark jacket. His eyes flicked across Rodolfo's face. A frown creased his forehead.

Watching his expression, Rodolfo said, "What's the matter?"

"It's a woman," Manuel replied sourly. "I do not like that."

Rodolfo laughed again. "Business is business, is it not? Besides, this is not just an ordinary woman."

"No?"

"I understand she is an ecdysiast," said Rodolfo.

"A what?"

"The North Americans would call her a stripper."

"Oh," said Manuel without interest. "Well, I accept, Rodolfo."

"Good."

They finished their coffee in silence and left the café together. When they shook hands in the avenue outside, Rodolfo left banknotes in Manuel's hand. . .

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Two weeks later the Photographer went ashore in Lisbon from a shabby freighter anchored in the Tagus. The freighter, for a price far lower than airfare, had brought Manuel and his cameras, along with the ship's cargo of hides, cocoa, and castorbeans, from Brazil. Since he was paying his own expenses, Manuel saw no reason to waste money on luxury travel. With him to waste money was an unforgivable sin, almost as bad as producing a blurred or poorly composed photograph.

Unwilling to invite attention, he walked from the Santa Apolonia dock through the warren of shopping streets east of Rua da Madelena to the modest *estalagem* which he had found clean and comfortable on his one previous visit to Lisbon. This was a small inn called Pensão São Paolo off Rua da Carmo not far from the Archeological Museum.

In the shadowed lobby of the inconspicuous third-class lodging he registered for a room under his own name, Manuel Andradas. The desk clerk recalled his former visit and perfunctorily welcomed him back.

For three days thereafter Manuel behaved exactly as a Brazilian tourist might behave—or as a professional Brazilian photographer on assignment in Portugal. With two cameras draped about him, he visited Lisbon's places of interest, taking numerous photographs of everything from Belem Tower and Black Horse Square to the reconstructed walls of St. George's castle on the heights and the panoramic view of Lisbon spread out in the river valley below. He even boarded a quiet-running train which took him up the coast to Estoril where he photographed the new Casino and the flower gardens. He returned to Pensão São Paolo weary but obviously satisfied with his excursion.

About eight o'clock on the evening of the third day he set about his true business. Penetrating gusts of wind, bearing the salty tang of the Tagus estuary, swept cold needles of rain through the streets when he left his lodging. Indifferently, he turned up his coat collar and began to walk briskly eastward. Despite the inclement weather many people were abroad in the streets. No one, however, spared Manuel a passing glance.

As he walked head down against the blowing rain, progressing steadily from one streetlight to the next on Rua Garrett, he plucked from his memory the words Rodolfo had scrawled for him on the café menu. The address? Rua da Rosa. Yes. In the Bairro Alto section, where most of the city's night clubs and *boîtes* man-

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aged to maintain a precarious balance between prosperity in the tourist season and bankruptcy in the off months. The name of the night club? Galeria 63. Yes. And the woman's name? He remembered it perfectly. Matilda Pirés. Yes. The stripper. She performed, no doubt, at Galeria 63.

Matilda Pirés. A woman who showed her body for money. Who was she, what had she done that somebody in Rio de Janeiro—Rodolfo's nameless client—should want her nullified? (That was the word Manuel preferred to use to himself. Nullified. It had a more businesslike ring than 'murdered' or 'assassinated'—a more impersonal cachet.) Was Matilda Pirés disgracing an ancient name, Manuel speculated, by displaying her body in public and thus inviting death from some unforgiving member of a proud family? Was she a faithless mistress perhaps? Or the object of the lethal jealousy of another woman? In any event, the Photographer thought with satisfaction, half a million cruzeiros was a splendid sum of money.

Manuel rarely knew the truth about his assignments. Why his services were required, or by whom, was not his business. No, his business was merely to carry out efficiently the nullifications for which he was hired. He preferred it that way. One could not be totally objective about a job if one were emotionally involved.

Galeria 63, when he reached it, proved unimpressive. The club occupied the ground floor of a tall narrow building, almost crumbling with age, which was separated from another almost like it by a dark alley, leading no doubt to the rear of Galeria 63. To the stage door?

Rectangular frames of frosty neon tubing on either side of the night club's entrance held posed photographs of Matilda Pirés, the featured performer. Manuel's first thought was that the photographs were of shockingly inferior quality. The dolt responsible for them knew nothing at all about lighting, that was obvious. But the pictures did convey quite clearly, Manuel admitted, that Matilda Pirés was a strikingly beautiful, dark-haired, dark-eyed woman of about 30; that she had a graceful carriage and an excellent figure; that she was a bit too generously endowed above the waist for Manuel's taste; and that she had a two-inch butterfly tattooed on the curve of her right breast, under her arm—a touch that Manuel considered decidedly piquant.

In some of the pictures Matilda had her mouth wide-open as though singing. He noticed then that Matilda was billed as Dis-

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robing Artiste *and* Singer. Presumably, the singing of *fados,* the sad ancient folksongs of Portugal, while disrobing merrily on stage, held a special appeal.

While Manuel studied the pictures, several patrons went by him into the club's foyer. The rain had turned to wind-blown mist.

With a quick glance up and down the street to be sure he was unnoticed, Manuel slid into the alley that seemed to run toward the rear of Galeria 63. If he was to nullify Matilda Pirés at her night club, he decided, it would have to be here in this dark alley. Privacy, after all, was essential to such work as his. Then, shaking his head, he suspected that in the end he would have to follow Matilda Pirés home to her lodging, wherever that might be, and arrange to nullify her there. Or at any rate, at some spot safely removed from this sleazy little *boîte.*

He cat-footed down the alley. The nearest streetlight on Rua da Rosa cast only a faint illumination into the alley's mouth, none at all into the twenty-yard gulf of darkness existing between the passage entrance and the single mist-shrouded bulb he could see glowing dimly at its far end. Listening to the eerie wailing of the wind over the roofs of the city about him, Manuel stepped carefully over the rain-slick cobblestones.

Suddenly a shrill cry of alarm brought him to a halt. Instantly thereafter something round and hard struck his midsection, drove his breath from his chest in a gigantic grunt, and sent him tumbling backward five feet away on the seat of his trousers in half an inch of icy rainwater.

As he fell, the object that had struck him fell with him, landing painfully on Manuel's outstretched legs just as a deafening crash reverberated in the narrow alley.

Manuel knew an agonizing moment of confusion, even of fear, before he recognized the weight on his legs for what it was—the squirming body of a young boy enveloped in a black raincoat and struggling now to regain his feet, just as Manuel was.

Only then did Manuel realize what had happened.

The battering ram to his midsection had been the boy's head. The crash had been a coping tile (loosened by rain and wind?) falling into the alley from the roof of one of the adjacent crumbling buildings. The Photographer's eyes, grown more accustomed now to the alley's gloom, showed him shards of shattered masonry scattered in a sunburst pattern about the very spot on which he had been standing but a moment before.

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On his feet again, but still winded, Manuel reached out and clamped his hands roughly on the shoulders of the youth now standing before him.

"Are you hurt, Senhor?" The boy's high-pitched young voice was laced with anxiety. "The tile would have struck you! *Verdadeiro*, I had to push you down! Do not be angry with me, Senhor. You are hurting my shoulders, please."

Manuel dropped his hands. "Pardon," he said. "I did not mean to. And I am assuredly not angry with you. How could I be angry with a boy who quite possibly saved my life?" He looked at the tile fragments, and, able at last to draw a deep breath, said, "You were coming down the passage from the rear door of Galeria 63?"

The youth nodded and said eagerly, "I happened to look upward, and there it was, Senhor, the tile! Coming loose from the roof! Then I looked where it would strike if it fell, and I saw *you*, Senhor. Wasn't that lucky?"

"Lucky indeed," said Manuel quietly, squeezing rainwater out of his sopping trousers. "You risked grave injury to yourself by pushing me aside." He eyed the boy curiously. Thin, white, frightened face under dripping hat. Ten years old at most. "Are you a busboy at Galeria 63 that you happen to walk down this passage at the precise moment to save me from a cracked skull?" Then, swept by a wave of unfamiliar emotion, he went on without waiting for an answer, "In any event, I am grateful. I thank you from my heart." He smiled at the skinny child through the misty darkness and asked with a premonition of disaster, "What is your name, boy? *Como se chama?*"

"Pedro Pirés," said the boy. "My mother is the artiste at Galeria 63."

Manuel returned to Rio by air. The deadline given him by Rodolfo was approaching. And there was work yet to do.

He went directly from the airport to his studio. There he spent eleven pleasurable hours, principally in his darkroom, scarcely pausing to eat or drink. Satisfied with the results of his labors, he made the anonymous telephone call that put him in touch with the man called Rodolfo and arranged to meet him again at ten the next morning in the café by the flower market.

When they were settled with tiny cups of *cafezhino* before them once more, Rodolfo asked, "Success?"

"Of course. Did you ever know me to fail?"

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Rodolfo shrugged. "All the same, I must have proof for our client."

Manuel took from his pocket a five-by-seven-inch black-and-white photograph and handed it across the table to Rodolfo. Rodolfo accepted it, and holding it under the edge of the table out of sight of passersby, examined it eagerly.

After a moment he shook his head with mock regret and said, "What a pity, Photographer. That so much—ah—talent should be wasted!" He devoured with his gaze the photograph of an almost-nude Matilda Pirés, even though it was instantly apparent to him that the stripper was dead when the picture was snapped.

In G-string and pasties only, she lay sprawled on a littered floor below an elevated wooden platform which extended from side to side of a mirrored backbar. The place was a *boîte* called Galeria 63, according to the name etched on the backbar mirror. The stripper's arms were stretched grotesquely above her head, her eyes closed, her torso was twisted, her mouth wide open as though in the rictus of a scream. And her head dropped to one side at an impossible angle on the slender white neck. Beneath one upflung arm a small tattooed butterfly clung to the curve of her breast.

Rodolfo said on a note of reluctant admiration, "You nullified her in *public*? In this *boîte* during her performance?"

"Not in public," Manuel said modestly, "it was at a rehearsal of her art. Early one morning after the *boîte* was closed. The newspaper headline was probably *Stripper's Fall Fatal.* But I didn't wait to see. It's obvious, isn't it, that she broke her neck falling from the runway where she performed her disrobing routine?"

"So? And how did you arrange that?"

Manuel held out his right hand, palm up. The callused ridge of muscle along its edge and the chopping motion he made with it were answer enough.

"Good," said Rodolfo, barely able in reality to control a shiver. "I shall show this to our client. And if all is well I shall meet you tomorrow afternoon at four in the flower market." Rodolfo stood up and went off with the photograph, leaving Manuel to pay for their coffee.

When they met in the flower market the following afternoon, Rodolfo paused only long enough to shake Manuel's hand and say, "Our client is satisfied." This time he left an even thicker sheaf of currency in Manuel's hand than when they first met.

Almost casually Manuel pocketed the banknotes and hailed a

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taxi. In it he had himself driven to Copacabana Beach. He got off on Avenida Atlantica. After the taxi had departed, he walked half a mile west to a tall apartment building facing the ocean. He entered the lobby and checked the names on the directory, both surprised and pleased that there was no uniformed doorman to interfere with him in this haunt of the very rich.

Apartment 14 occcupied the entire top floor, he noted. He rode up in a self-service elevator and stepped out into a small elevator lobby, richly furnished. Facing him was a hand-carved door with the number 14 discreetly displayed on a golden medallion above it. He pressed the button next to the door, heard the silvery notes of a chime inside. But his ring remained unanswered, even after a second and third attempt.

Looking about him, then, Manuel discovered in a corner of the elevator foyer a metal firedoor opening on a flight of steep firestairs. After a moment's hesitation he pushed the firedoor open, stepped through, propped the door open an unnoticeable crack with a matchbook, and took up his stand behind it.

Half an hour later the hum of the ascending elevator warned him that his vigil was at an end. Soundlessly he applied an eye to the narrow opening of the firedoor just as the elevator doors whispered apart and a tall, faultlessly groomed man of 60 stepped into the foyer. He had a crisp white mustache beneath a hawk's nose, scrubbed pink skin stretched tightly over high cheekbones, and eyes like chips of green arctic ice. This man opened the door to Apartment 14 with a key and disappeared inside.

The Photographer allowed five minutes to pass before he left his station on the firestairs landing and rang the bell of Apartment 14 again. This time his ring was answered promptly by the man who had recently emerged from the elevator. "Yes?" His voice carried the unmistakable snap of authority.

"I am seeking a Senhor Francisco Andiero," said Manuel. "Are you he?"

"That is my name, yes. How can I serve you?"

"I bring you a message from Bartolomeu Andiero, your son," answered Manuel with a smile, "a young man I met recently while dining in a restaurant in Madrid. We were forced to share the same table by an unexpected rush of diners."

The cold eyes staring into Manuel's softened perceptibly. Yet Senhor Andiero repeated, as though in some doubt, "In Madrid, did you say?"

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Manuel nodded.

Andiero stepped back and invited the Photographer into his apartment with a courteous gesture. "How good of you!" he said. "I have not seen my son for over a year, so you will understand a personal message from him is very welcome."

Manuel walked through a short entrance corridor into a spacious living room that occupied the full width of the building. The open windows at one end offered a lofty view of Copacabana Beach with its bathers, sun worshippers, kite-flying youngsters, cashew-juice stands. The opposite windows, also open, looked down on an asphalt-paved parking lot behind the apartment house. The room's furnishings, Manuel noted with approval, were such as befitted the bachelor dwelling of the founder and managing director of Diamond Industries, Lda.

At Andiero's invitation Manuel took a chair and placed his camera case between his feet. He politely declined the sherry his host offered.

Andiero, seating himself in a velvet-upholstered chair nearby, said, "May I know your name, Senhor?"

"Of course. Pardon me. I am Manuel Andradas, a professional photographer here in Rio. Perhaps you have seen some of my work in *Rio Illustrated*?"

"I have indeed. And admired it."

"I was in Spain recently on assignment," Manuel explained, "and thus happened to meet your son by accident. When he heard I would be returning to Rio he begged me to deliver his message to you."

"I see," said Andiero. "And how long ago was this?"

"A week ago. I have just returned last night."

Again Andiero said, "I see."

"He charged me with two messages, in fact," said Manuel chattily. "The first was to convey to you his devoted filial greetings with the hope that your health continues excellent as usual."

Andiero nodded. "It does, I am glad to say. And the second message?"

Manuel spread his hands in a deprecatory gesture. "It was more personal, Senhor Andiero. Something I felt, if you will forgive me, that your son would not have asked me to communicate to you unless he was greatly distressed, even desperate."

A spark leaped in the ice of Andiero's gaze. "My son distressed? Surely not." Andiero spoke stiffly. "Bartolomeu is easy-going and

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composed, always. So what was this desperate second message if you please?" The snap was back in his voice.

"Your son asked me to appeal to you as a loving and understanding father"—Manuel paused as though embarrassed—"to forego your violent objections to his forthcoming marriage to a certain Senhora Matilda Pirés in Lisbon. He implied that this lady is a—a café entertainer."

There was both relief and outrage in Andiero's reply. "Sir," he said, "you presume, I think, upon a brief acquaintance. Matters such as you mention are private and confidential, and in this case, utterly false, of course. I suggest that my son Bartolomeu never charged you with any such message. You are here for another purpose entirely."

Manuel frowned, as though puzzled. "Another purpose?"

"Blackmail."

Manuel put on an injured look. "Please," he said, "you use a very ugly word."

Andiero repeated it. "Blackmail."

Manuel said, "Perhaps you will listen, nevertheless, to the story I constructed in my imagination from the facts I learned?"

Andiero's lips tightened. "Be brief. There is a limit to my patience."

"Well, then," Manuel began solemnly, "it appears there was once a very wealthy man living here in Rio who headed a vast diamond mining and marketing organization. His only son—and heir—is in charge of the firm's Lisbon office. This son falls deeply in love with a striptease dancer and singer of *fados* in a small Lisbon café and asks her to marry him, writing to his father at once to tell him the happy turn of events and ask his blessing on the match. The blessing, needless to say, is not forthcoming.

"Instead, the father condemns his son's foolishness in contemplating marriage with a woman so very far beneath his station, threatens to disinherit him, and sends him on a trumped-up mission out of Lisbon to Madrid in an attempt to bring him to his senses by separating him from his café dancer. The son is stubborn, defies the father by setting the wedding date for the first of the month—with or without the father's blessing. Thus, the father faces not only the loss of his beloved son to a vulgar dancer, but also the inevitable fragmentation of his hard-won family fortune."

Manuel nodded gravely. "You see, Senhor Andiero, it is an old and familiar story.

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Andiero shrugged and brushed his white mustache with a forefinger, complacent, no doubt, in the knowledge that Matilda Pirés was already dead and his problem solved. "A fairy tale," he said contemptuously, "and one which no son of mine would ever confide to a casual stranger, even if it were true. I am therefore curious, Senhor Andradas. Where in the world did you accumulate this trash heap of false statements?"

Manuel leaned forward in his chair. "From your grandson," he said. "Perhaps that is why it sounds like a fairy tale?"

"You fool," said Andiero dispassionately, "I have no grandson."

"Not yet. But after the first of the month, Senhor Andiero, you will have one. A step-grandson. And a fine brave boy he is too. A ten-year-old named Pedro Pirés. He save my life not long ago."

"I have never heard of a Pedro Pirés," said Andiero. And perhaps he hadn't, Manuel reflected. Bartolomeu Andiero might well have hesitated to prejudice his case still further by admitting to his father the existence of a son by Matilda's former marriage.

Andiero rose to his feet. "I suggest," he said, "that you leave now, before I call the police. Which I fully intend to do. You cannot hoodwink me with your lies."

Manuel said quietly, "But I already have."

Andiero froze. His glacial glance swiveled to Manuel's face. "What do you mean by that?"

"I have already collected half a million cruzeiros from you," said Manuel, "to nullify this Matilda Pirés."

Slowly Andiero sank back into his chair. "You are the man who—?"

Manuel didn't allow him to finish. "I am the man, yes," he said, "who was sent to Lisbon by The Big Ones to carry out the contract you made with them."

"Well, then," said Andiero matter-of-factly, "what is this talk of hoodwinking? You accomplished your mission. And you were paid, I have no doubt, as soon as I saw and approved the photographic proof you furnished."

Manuel gave a half bow in his chair. "The photograph is my work, true," he said. He thought of the many pictures he had snapped of Matilda Pirés' act in Lisbon as she moved sinuously across the platform in Galeria 63, singing her *fados*, contorting her body in bumps and grinds, doing her disrobing tricks in the spotlight. And he thought of the hours spent in his studio last night, developing film, patching, stripping, recopying negatives,

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making copy prints, producing at last that final persuasive print that conclusively proved the dancer's death and ennabled him to collect the balance of his half-million cruzeiros.

"If you are thinking of the photograph showing Matilda Pirés' death," he said to Andiero, "it is a *falsificãcao*—a fake. A montage of may different exposures put together to depict a scene that never existed."

After a long moment of silence Andiero said, "Then Matilda Pirés is not dead? Is that what you are telling me?"

"Exactly."

"I believe," said Andiero calmly, "that The Big Ones may have something to say about your absurd—ah—confession." He looked across the room to where a telephone rested on a small table beside a bookcase.

Manuel said, "Wait. That will solve nothing. Your money has not been wasted, Senhor Andiero. I give you my assurance. And I want to convince you of that."

Andiero said nothing, only glared icily.

Manuel went on quickly, "What, after all, did you seek to accomplish with your half-million cruzeiros? To save your son from marrying a woman unworthy, in your opinion, of him and of your name. Was that not your motive, simply stated? And quite clearly you hoped to do it without losing your son's affection and respect. Hence your resort to secret murder. To me. Yet I submit to you, Senhor Andiero, that you have fully accomplished your objective. For I tell you truthfully that Matilda Pirés *is* worthy of your son and your name.

"She is a young respectable widow who happens to be without resources and stoops to café dancing only to support her son. And as for retaining your own son's affection and respect, those too are assured. Because he will never know to what lengths you were willing to go to deny him his happiness. Do you agree with me in this, Senhor Andiero?"

"I do not," said Andiero grimly, "nor do I need the cheap moralizing of a paid assassin to teach me behavior!"

Manuel sighed. "I hoped you would be reasonable," he said, "and spare us both more trouble. However, if you still insist on a death for your half-million cruzeiros, you shall have one."

He rose to his feet in one smooth movement. Andiero came up with him. Good, thought Manuel, this man is not a coward, at least. He felt a pressure above his left hip and looked down.

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Senhor Andiero had a revolver in his hand and was grinding its muzzle cruelly into Manuel's side.

Where had it come from, Manuel wondered briefly. The cushions of his host's chair? A hidden holster, perhaps? Well, it seemed that the head of a diamond empire did not go unarmed even in his own home.

The Photographer raised his hands above his head in the classic gesture of surrender.

Andiero said in frosty tones, "You are mistaken, Senhor Andradas. I shall get *two* deaths for my money, not one. Matilda Pirés will still be taken care of before the wedding date. And you will be taken care of, I have no doubt, by The Big Ones when I tell them how you have deceived them. Free of charge, too, one imagines." He gave a bark of laughter.

Manuel nodded. "Every profession has its hazards," he observed philosophically.

With these words three things happened almost as one. Manuel pivoted six inches to his right. His right hand, raised above his head in surrender, began a vicious downward chop. And Andiero's revolver spoke once, the sound all but muffled by Manuel's clothing and flesh.

The stiffened edge of Manuel's hand took Andiero in the neck with a thunking sound almost as loud as the revolver shot. Andiero dropped the revolver and collapsed like a ragdoll, his head lolling grotesquely to one side. Manuel caught and held him, then lowered his body into a chair. Not until then did The Photographer become conscious of the burning pain above his hip and the creeping wetness that bathed his side.

When it became evident that the small voice of the revolver had gone unheard, Manuel went into Andiero's palatial bathroom and examined his wound. Although bleeding copiously, it proved to be only a scratch, a shallow trench dug in the soft flesh above his hip. His sudden body twist to get leverage for his blow at the moment of firing had changed the bullet's intended course. Manuel quickly covered the wound with a *ligadura* of gauze and tape that he found in Andiero's medicine chest.

He returned to the living room, and under the disinterested scrutiny of Andiero's dead eyes, searched for the spent bullet which should by rights have lodged in his flesh. He failed to find it, but concluded comfortably that it must have gone through the open window behind him. He picked up Andiero's revolver from

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the rug and stowed it in his camera case. He wiped the arms of the chair he had used free of any possible fingerprints. And finally he carried Andiero's body to the open window, tossed it out into space, and watched as it pinwheeled downward to the parking lot far below.

He grinned to himself, thinking what a puzzle he had created for the press and the police—to discover the reason why a wealthy and distinguished citizen like Francisco Andiero should take his own life at the peak of his career. For beyond doubt he was a suicide. When a man falls 14 stories onto asphalt paving, who questions a broken neck?

Leaving Apartment 14, Manuel pulled the self-locking door softly to behind him, holding the doorknob in fingers covered by his handkerchief. Then he crossed the elevator lobby to the firedoor and began to descend the firestairs to the street, rapidly yet in uncanny silence.

As he went down, floor after floor, he experienced his usual feeling of pride in work well done; but also he was filled to the brim with an odd sense of virtue—something completely foreign to his nature. It stemmed, no doubt, he told himself happily, from the prompt repayment of his debt to the boy Pedro Pirés in Lisbon.

He permitted himself a silent chuckle, reflecting on the ironies of his profession, of life and death. In Lisbon a boy had saved the life of an obscure photographer from Rio. By doing so the boy had also saved the life of his mother. But in saving her life the boy had doomed the man who wanted her dead—the man who, on the first of the coming month, might have become the boy's grandfather.

A twisted chain of events, to be sure. Yet Manuel was not dissatisfied with their outcome. For had he not, through his photographic cunning, secured a half-million cruzeiros to add to his store? And had he not, through his skill at nullification, arranged for the little boy who had saved his life to become, some day, one of the richest men in the world?

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a *NEW* suspense story by

NEDRA TYRE

At the end of POETIC JUSTICE *we wrote: "Poets bring order out of chaos. Detectives, in resolving mysteries, also bring order out of chaos." It can be argued that writers also have the same obligation—to bring order out of chaos. But every rule has its exception, and to paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, a rigid consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds . . .*

And it is not only fog that comes on little cat feet . . .

ON LITTLE CAT FEET

by NEDRA TYRE

A thin cat was defiantly meowing and pacing beneath the yellowed and frayed sign in the lobby that proclaimed: NO PETS ALLOWED.

Angelina Simes paid little attention to the cat. She thought it had sneaked in through the heavy entrance door of the apartment house when one of the tenants had been slow in closing it, and she was too loaded down with library books and groceries to put the cat outside.

She walked past the bank of elevators that had been out of use and boarded up for years. She disdained the small coffin-sized self-service elevator—she had had too many dismaying experiences of being stalled in it between floors. She walked up the once grand staircase to the third floor and down the wide, long corridors to her minuscule room and kitchenette.

This huge building had once been a place of light and grace, surrounded by rolling landscaped grounds and gardens and filled with happy residents.

As the city had grown, other buildings encroached on it, crowded it, choked it, and now, she must admit, it was a derelict. The halls went unswept and unwaxed. The woodwork was furred with dirt. The wallpaper became unattached and furled and un-

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furled like banners in a breeze, and the plastering sifted down like soot-stained snow or, on occasion, fell in huge chunks.

She was ashamed to use such a word as derelict to describe the place where she had known bliss as a child and young girl and then as a bride—it had sheltered her and her happiness all those long years ago. Everyone she had loved most was dead—her parents, her brothers, her husband, but someone had to be sole survivor, and the memory of her past joys was enough to sustain her.

How could she desert the house after all the pleasure it had once contained? She owed it her loyalty. And there really was no other place to go on her limited income. Though the rent was far too high, it wasn't as high as that of newer apartments. And it was convenient to the grocery store, the library, and her volunteer job at the city hospital, the places essential to her now circumscribed life.

The large gracious apartments had been chopped up into numerous cubicles advertised as efficiencies, and she had the smallest, far back on the third floor, with barely space enough for a bed, table, bureau, and two chairs. And downstairs in the basement, locked securely in a storage bin, was the gigantic trunk that had belonged to her grandmother. It held the last of her treasures and mementoes—her mother's wedding dress, her own wedding dress, her father's West Point parade uniform, her husband's velvet smoking jacket, snapshots, school yearbooks, trip diaries, newspaper clippings . . .

Later that day, on her next encounter with the cat, Angelina tried to ease it out the front door. Nothing she did had any effect. She couldn't catch the creature and she wasn't quick enough to maneuver it outside with her foot.

Didn't the cat understand that the house was hostile territory? It could starve to death in these endless halls. No tenant was likely to give it a home. There were too many transients, too many fly-by-night people, and, she was convinced, too many petty criminals. Not that she encountered many people, and those she occasionally met in the halls scurried by as if they wanted no notice to be taken of them. And the thick substantial walls muffled even the loudest voices. The house was a citadel of silence and secrets. Sometimes Angelina had the eerie feeling that she was the only tenant.

"Here, kitty," she pleaded, "come outside with me."

The cat backed away and its green eyes flashed hatred.

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When Angelina Simes returned that afternoon there was more concrete evidence of the cat just outside her door.

What was the term Angelina's Aunt Rosemary had used when a cat or dog fouled a rug or floor? Oh, yes, Aunt Rosemary had said the animal had left a calling card.

There was nothing for Angelina to do but to clean up the mess.

The calling cards continued to dismay Angelina.

The cat was a nuisance and must be got rid of immediately.

Angelina had no friends in the apartment house to ask for help. She appealed to a paperboy and he said he had better things to do than to chase a cat. The postman agreed to help her round up the cat and put it out the door if she could get it into the lobby. Twice someone from the S.P.C.A. came out at Angelina's request but both times, though Angelina led him through all the long halls and the vast basement, the cat was nowhere to be found. Angelina had the distinct and unsettling impression that the man thought the cat was in Angelina's imagination rather than in the house.

And perhaps the cat was no longer in the house. Someone else might have become just as annoyed as Angelina and managed to put it out. Or maybe the cat had willingly left this dark forbidding place.

But Angelina was not to be rid of the cat quite so easily.

When Angelina next saw the cat she was appalled by its emaciation and overwhelmed by pity. What a life it must have led—living under doorsteps and in alleys and fighting with other hungry cats for whatever spoiled food could be foraged from garbage cans. Now it was trapped and dying of hunger in a prison of its own choosing.

She really had no food to share. Her poverty forced her to eat sparingly, but surely she could give the poor tabby a bite of something. She cut a thin slice of cheese, placed it in a saucer, opened the door, and set the saucer down.

A little later when she investigated she saw that the cheese had disappeared and the saucer was turned over and newly cracked.

Next morning when Angelina Simes came back from the grocery store the cat was meowing frantically in the hall outside her door. And it looked so pitiful—its ribs seemed to penetrate its thin scraggly fur. Obviously it was begging her for food. What had she got herself into by giving it cheese yesterday? Now the cat would

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expect to be fed regularly and that was quite beyond Angelina's resources.

She set the groceries on the floor and fumbled for her key. By the time she had opened her door and gathered up the bag of groceries the cat had disappeared. Its wailing and starved look haunted her and she opened a can of tuna fish. She scooped out a large dollop, put it on a paper plate, and set it in the hall. She expected the cat to dash forward and gobble the tuna fish, and though the strong smell must have penetrated the entire corridor the cat did not appear.

Strange unpredictable creature!

Angelina stepped around the tuna fish when she left to do her volunteer work at the hospital, and when she returned she saw that her offering of food was still being spurned. Very well, Miss Puss, she thought, if you don't want this I certainly do, and she reached down to pick it up. From nowhere the cat leaped out and clawed Angelina's hand.

Later, after a trip to the library, she saw that the tuna fish was gone. Not only had the tuna fish vanished but the paper plate had also disappeared. The famished cat had been so hungry it had eaten the plate too. No wonder the threatened loss of the fish had made the cat attack Angelina.

Then she was astonished to see a grimy piece of ruled paper thumbtacked to her door. On it in large wobbly printed letters were three words: NO MORE HANDOUTS. Exclamation points and underscorings had bitten through the paper.

No more handouts. What did that mean?

Obviously it meant that the cat had an owner. Angelina had shared a little food with what she had thought was a friendless, starving cat and had only brought recriminations on herself.

What was even more annoying was to realize that she had been cleaning up after the cat while the owner had ignored that distasteful duty.

Angelina would have it out with him.

But where was the owner? She would find him if she had to visit every shabby apartment on every floor. Logic told her that it should be nearby. Why else would the cat frequent the hall on which Angelina lived?

She opened her door just in time to surpise the cat on a leisurely jaunt toward a door barely open at the end of the corridor.

The cat flashed through the opening and the door eased shut.

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Angelina's knock on the just closed door was resolute; she intended to be straightforward and hoped to complete her mission without emotion or argument.

Her sharp ears picked up words from inside the room that should have been heard only by the speaker and the beloved to whom they were addressed. A man's voice was cajoling, urgent, passionate. "Darling, darling, darling," the voice murmured. Angelina felt like a voyeur prying on lovers in an intimate moment and she backed away.

The cat's owner hadn't hesitated to tack his rude note to her door. Angelina would follow suit, though she would be the soul of diplomacy in what she wrote. She framed her message in as friendly, though firm, a manner as she felt the offenses warranted and signed herself, Sincerely yours, Angelina Parnell Simes. When she taped her note to the owner's door the masculine voice inside the room was even more passionate in its endearments than it had been before.

With a sense of at last having scored a small victory in her feud—if feud was the right term—with the cat, Angelina went to the public library to read the day's distressing news which made her ashamed of her petulance over so small an annoyance as the cat. She skimmed several magazines, then overloaded herself, as always, with books she couldn't resist borrowing, and walked home.

The note she had written to the cat's owner was torn in bits and scattered outside her door.

Her request had hit home, however, because the cat did become tidier.

But there was another development, and a most upsetting one.

The cat kept a close watch at Angelina's door. Those great green eyes in that small body maintained a constant vigil, and when Angelina ignored the cat and went down the hall it followed and had a strange mesmeric way of winding between her feet and then pawing at her skirt.

Angelina's annoyance changed to fear one morning when she opened the door and the cat spat at her. Angelina retreated and shut the door.

Her cowardice made her angry. She had to go to the hospital. It was almost lunchtime there and she helped to serve that meal. The patients needed her. She must go. When had she ever failed them? In record-breaking downpours, in the heaviest snowfall

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since weather statistics had been kept, she had always attended them faithfully.

If nature in all its caprices hadn't deterred her, how could such an insignificant creature as a cat?

Of course she wasn't going to let the wretched little animal stand in the way of her obligations to the patients.

She opened the door, then slammed it shut as the cat leaped toward her.

Angelina cowered behind the door long past lunchtime at the hospital.

Her vigil had left her weak as if she were in the middle of a debilitating illness. She had energy enough only to brew a cup of tea, and as soon as she had drunk it she went to bed.

The next day Angelina took herself in hand. If the hall swarmed with cats she must push past them and go to the hospital.

No such challenge faced her. The cat was not in the hall.

Angelina felt complimented by the reprimands showered on her by the nurses and aides and patients. Where had she been yesterday, everyone wanted to know. It wasn't like her to neglect her duty—for years they had been able to set their clocks by her. What on earth had happened to ruin her perfect record?

There was no way to explain her absence. She couldn't understand the cause herself because really it was so silly. How could one small animal that weighed at most—well, how much, surely not more than five or six pounds—fill her with such terror and uncertainty?

It mustn't again. It wouldn't again.

So Angelina Simes made profuse apologies and blamed a sudden fainting spell for her absence. Because of course no one would have believed her if she had said that a cat had disrupted her life. She couldn't believe it herself. And she must stop being overwrought.

But the cat was lurking at her door the next day when she tried to leave for the hospital. Angelina stayed in her room. And the cat also hovered there the day after that, as well as the day following, and Angelina could not force herself to leave her apartment.

The coast was miraculously clear on the fourth day, but when Angelina arrived at the hospital she was treated like an interloper. They admitted that she was a volunteer, but they had to

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have a volunteer on whom they could depend, and they had replaced her. And there went the work which she had done for so long and with so much pride and such a sense of service.

The day after her dismissal from the hospital Angelina opened her door to see the cat there as usual.

It appeared much larger. Angelina knew that was impossible. What had grown larger was her distaste for the creature. Angelina should have said, "Scat!" and stamped her foot. She should have got her broom and chased the cat away.

What on earth was she frightened of? If worst came to worst, the cat couldn't do anything beyond scratching Angelina.

It was late in the day for Angelina to develop a phobia for cats—to become an ailurophobe—wasn't that what people who hated cats were called?

Actually she was fond of cats. There had always been three or four at her family's country place. They hadn't kept any in town only because no pets were allowed in the apartment house.

But her mental reassurances did no good. Her blood and nerves would not respond to logic. Her room became a stronghold. She was withstanding a siege. The table became stacked with overdue books, and yet she could not go to the library. She would never be able to pay all the fines. She was restricting herself to less and less food so that she would not have to brave the hall to go to the grocery store.

Then, most unaccountably, Angelina began to take catnaps. They became compulsive. Never before in her life had she taken naps during the day—sleeping was for the nighttime.

Now in the afternoon, as she hovered in her room from fear of confronting the cat in the hall, she would doze suddenly, and the instant she lost consciousness the cat would be waiting for her in a dream. Angelina would awaken terrified as if from a nightmare, and then she pushed herself out of her chair, stood at the door, and wondered what mischief the cat was up to.

She chided herself. What had become of her common sense? Her dread of the cat was ridiculous. Her torment had to end.

But Angelina's cowering only worsened, and the catnaps became compulsive and menacing.

One afternoon Angelina jumped up from her catnap certain she knew what mischief the cat was up to. She was convinced that the cat was in the basement and had made its sly way to the huge trunk holding all that was left of her family's possessions.

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Angelina shuddered from the certainty that the cat had defiled them.

That fear impelled Angelina to race down the halls and stairways to the cavernous basement until she stumbled into the large enclosure where the trunk was.

It was safe. Thank God it was safe.

She knelt before the trunk and began to delve lovingly into her treasures, and her nostrils welcomed the scent of the lavender packets she had spread among the clothes.

Filled with gratitude that everything was in order, Angelina closed the great arch of the trunk's lid, and at that instant the cat leaped on the trunk and began to spit at Angelina. Its body was pulled into the shape of a horseshoe. Its eyes were laser beams of evil.

Angelina struck at the cat with all her strength, but she had not aimed carefully and she scarcely grazed it. The cat jumped beyond her reach, landing on the floor with the grace and poise of an acrobat, and remained quite still as if waiting for applause for its feat of agility.

Angelina fled from the harrowing scene.

When she entered her room she felt drained. Murder had been in her heart. Thank God her anger had made her so inept that she had barely brushed the cat.

Angelina's hands trembled, her teeth chattered.

Really, what a fool she was to be carrying on like a coward. Instead of cringing she ought to feel triumphant. She had shown the cat decisively that she was tired of its impudence and was perfectly capable of standing up for herself, even using violence if necessary.

With that reassuring thought Angelina lay down. Surely she had earned the right to relax, even to gloat a little over her last encounter with the cat.

A self-congratulatory smile had just come to her lips when a sharp knock struck against her door.

Who could it be? She never had any callers. Her apartment was in the back of the house on the third floor—door-to-door salesmen lost heart long before they reached the dark and remote region where she lived.

The fist pounded again.

"Open up," a voice commanded.

Another voice said, "She's in there all right."

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The harsh voices and abrupt knocking forced Angelina to act. She smoothed her hair, straightened her blouse, took a deep breath to try to compose herself, then opened the door on two men.

One was quite tall and the other was extremely short, almost dwarfish.

"That's her all right. That's the one who did it. She can't deny it."

The rasping voice belonged to the short man. However small he was, he was surprisingly strong, Angelina realized, when he grabbed her arm and roughly shoved her in front of him down the hall.

Angelina was too dazed to protest, but the larger man protested for her. "Just a minute," he said authoritatively. "There's no need for roughness."

"That's what you think. All she understands is roughness. She's the devil incarnate. We knew it from the beginning, but there was nothing we could do to protect ourselves against her. If you could have seen her trying to get on our good side. She fed my darling. Twice my precious nearly died of poisoned food. She couldn't even walk in the hall without this old witch molesting her. Wrote obscene threats. Accused her of filthy habits."

They had reached the lobby and the small man's grip on Angelina's arm had tightened. Then he moved in front of her and began dragging her down the basement steps and through the long maze of passageways that led to the furnace and storage space. At the next turning she was shoved into the enclosure that held her grandmother's enormous trunk.

"Make her confess," the small man shouted. "Make her confess that she murdered my wife."

Murdered his wife!

The man was mad!

Angelina looked at the trunk, then she glanced a short distance from it and saw something lying on the cracked cement floor. A billowing caftan or smock covered its body. She stooped and looked more closely. It appeared to be the body of a small wizened woman. Whoever it was, whatever it was, it was quite dead, though its eyes were open.

Angelina Simes recognized the eyes at once. She had dreaded them for weeks. They were the eyes of the cat.

She did not really hear the other man, the tall authoritative one,

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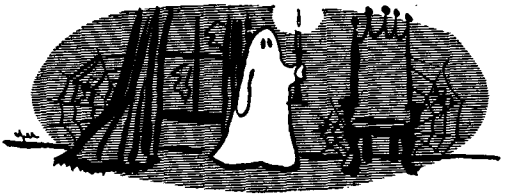
and yet she instinctively obeyed him when he said, "I'm a police officer from the Homicide Department and this man has accused you of murdering his wife. You must come with me down to headquarters."

EDITORIAL QUERIES: Was it a cat? Or a small wizened woman? . . . It is interesting to speculate *beyond* the end of a story, remembering that "what song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions are not beyond *all* conjecture" . . .



DETECTIVERSE

SITTING DUCKS

by MARK GRENIER

The Photographer's victims, like babes in the wood,
Are a snap for Andradas to kill;
They know they'll be out of the picture for good,
But they're dying to pose for him, still.

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continuing the bicentennial series by

S. S. RAFFERTY

Welcome to the sparsely settled colony of Georgia in the year 1761. Here, as guests of planter Tolliver Smyth, Captain Jeremy Cork and his yeoman Wellman Oaks encounter another test of what Cork relishes most—the solution of a "social puzzle." The brew is heady—a hangman, a gravesman, death masks, quicksand, herbal medicine . . . and black magic.

"You can't have it both ways," the Captain warned. "We have a dispute over identity, so we must let the corpse speak for itself" . . .

THE GEORGIA RESURRECTION

by S. S. RAFFERTY

"To be sure, Captain Cork, I agree," Tolliver Smyth said, readjusting himself in the high-back cane chair after refilling our drinks. "Superstition is a weakness in the chain of reality, but even a weak link is better than none, especially here in the Georgia plantations."

Out in the darkness, through the heavy muslin screens that gave entry to a slight breeze and yet protected us from the fierce insects that churned out of the swamps, came the rhythms of drums. They had been beating since supper, and although a bit unnerving, the crude timpani was oddly hypnotic. Suddenly Smyth chuckled to himself.

"Was that meant to be a pun, Captain?" he asked. "Calling it *black* magic? Very clever when you come to think of it. The slaves call it *vodo*."

"Yes," Cork said. "I have run into it in the Indies, especially on Hispaniola. It is outlawed there, I believe."

"And frowned on here, sorry to say. What harm can a few drumbeats and a chant or two do, yet it scares the locals hereabout out of their skins. I say, if it keeps the slaves happy and

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productive, let them conjure away."

"You are most progressive, sir," Cork remarked, hiding his pejorative intent in mild observation. I, of course, could interpret his true feelings, for I know my employer better than any other man in the American colonies. Cork detests the concept of slavery; in fact, it was this abhorrence that had brought us to the Georgia colony in the summer of 1761.

When he first devised a machine for the harvesting of rice, I thought he had finally decided to put his mind to industry rather than the solution of what he calls "social puzzles." But the fervour with which he approached the task and the speed with which he implemented it soon told me his real mission. If he could successfully prove the economy of his intention, he would render slavery unnecessary in these terribly hot and dank deltas, where no white man could toil more than an hour or two at a time.

Tolliver Smyth's plantation was near the Brunswick settlement several miles up one of the many small rivers that finger this remote and sparsely populated area. The Tolliver lands were called a "spread" by its master, in contrast to the smaller farms scattered about the back country. Smyth himself was an amiable young man of 30 who had recently come out from England to try his hand at a frontier fortune. And he had the strong hands for it, despite all his gentlemanly ways.

During supper, before the drums from the slave quarters had started, our main topic of conversation had centered on the harvesting scheme itself, and there was much chiding at my expense because I was the only one of the trio who was beardless. Before we left Charleston, Cork had begun to allow his usually trim barba to spread into a full beard. I found the suggestion that I too grow a beard ludicrous, since the excessive heat of this semi-tropical place would roast a man to the bone.

Cork hadn't prepared me for the mosquitoes and gnats which had been eating me alive since we arrived. However, the bugs did not seem to bother Tunxis, the tamed Quinnipiac Indian who serves as the Captain's shadow. His method is to smear himself with a foul mixture of skunk oil and berry juice. It not only helps keep the insects away, but all humankind as well. As usual, he was out of doors somewheres—he refuses to enter under a roof.

We had arrived at Finderlay, as the plantation was called, earlier that day, and were now relaxing as best we could in the incessant heat. Overhead, from the verandah ceiling, swung a broad

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woven-reed plank that served as a fan, its locomotion provided by some unseen black hand. We were sipping dark rum, Smyth and I having refused to join Cork in his own ritual of eating raw clams liberally laced with vinegar.

"Well, I can see where a Christian community would be upset by occult arts being practiced in their midst," I put in.

Cork looked up from a clamshell. "The only thing that doesn't upset a Christian is another Christian, Oaks," he said, devouring the clam meat, "and then only if he totally agrees with him. It seems you are the only white man on the place, Smyth."

"I plan to marry one of these days, but I have to get Finderlay in shape for womankind, I'm afraid. What is it, Neela? You look like a startled fidget."

The tall black woman who had just come out onto the verandah was indeed astir. When we arrived earlier, I had noticed that her button-brown eyes were bright and minikin gay; they were now horse-wide with fear. She didn't speak, and merely cocked her head towards the front of the house.

"What the deuce has gotten into you, girl?" Smyth said impatiently. "Are there callers?"

She merely nodded.

"Then show them out here," Smyth told her. "Must be the devil himself," he said as we waited. "She's usually a calm woman."

Seconds later we had evidence of her consternation. I felt my own throat tighten as they loomed into view through the candle haze, presenting us with a bizarre duo of ominous dimensions.

Though the temperature had to be well over 90 degrees, and the humidity thickly oppressive, both men were dressed in winter greatcoats of immense bulk and mourning blackness. Despite their out-of-season bundlement, they showed no sign of discomfort; their alabaster faces glistened like hoarfrost on chipped stone. They could have been citizens of the netherworld, and instinctively I was repelled by them.

The taller of the two was heavyset, with a leonine head and a cavernous mouth that echoed his speech in deep drum tones. The other man was snipe-like in stature, with pathetically thin legs supporting an immense upper torso; when he spoke, he had a habit of turning his oblong head from side to side as if he were unable to see over his sharply pointed nose.

The latter announced himself as Zachary Gooms, and the black scarf trailing from the rim of his tricorner had already told us his

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profession of gravesman. The taller one announced that he was Simon Cratch, who made his living as a hangman. This was certainly strange postprandial companionship, and Smyth seemed annoyed at the intrusion by men of such low station.

"We bury our own here at Finderlay, Gooms, and slaves are too expensive to hang, Cratch, no matter what the crime."

"Well, sir," Cratch said uneasily, "we thought we could save you some trouble, since we understand you let your nigras practice heathen religion."

"What my people do on Finderlay is my affair," Smyth said sternly. "What *trouble* are you talking about?"

"Well, sir, Gooms is the local man, so I'll let him tell it," Cratch acceded to his companion.

Smyth raised a hand in tacit approval. "Go on, Gooms, I thought you looked familiar. You have a coffin shop in Brunswick."

"Correct, sir, coffins and burials and fine furniture, if you wish. But even as the official county gravesman, it's a poor living. Now the coffins are gaining favour with the townsfolk, although you people out in the back country still make your own. But the furniture's another matter, with people sending to England for it."

"At least you can make a living," Cratch lamented. "I purposely came to Georgia thinking there would be a great need for my services."

"Why is that?" Cork queried.

Cratch looked at Smyth, who said, "This is Captain Jeremy Cork and his yeoman, Wellman Oaks."

"Well, Captain Cork," Cratch went on, "it seemed to me that since many of the felons were being transported from our gaols at home to Georgia, and felons never changing their ways, as you know, there would be a brisk business for me.

"But it turned out not to be the case, and I near starved for lack of commissions. To add to my misfortune and a stroke of bad timing, I requested transfer back to England and was granted it. Of course now the Escape Commission is a-comin' over and there'll be lots of work for the new man at the derrick."

"Escape Commission? Sounds royal and self-contradictory," I said.

"Its mission has received quite a broadcast in these parts, gentlemen," Smyth explained. "Not only are the colonists perturbed by the legally-transported convicts, but terror is slowly building up

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over the escaped cutthroats who somehow make it to these shores and seek refuge among old criminal friends."

"Yes," Cork said, "several newspapers in the north have come out quite strongly for an end to transportation."

"Aye, and woe to my timing of transfer," Cratch consoled himself. "The Commission will bring with them a warder from each of the main prisons who know these escaped scoundrels on sight. They'll be full gibbets from here to Canada, they will. Now as luck would have it I missed my ship at Brunswick and happened by Mr. Gooms's shop. I wouldn't want the foul deed on my record."

"Foul deed? What are you talking about, man?" Smyth was irritated and abrupt. Cork seemed interested, however, and tried to calm our host.

"Perhaps these fellows have a tale to tell, Smyth. It will pass the evening. Why don't you two sit down?"

Smyth nodded agreement and they took seats.

"Well, gentlemen, the problem seems to be Arthur Briddleton here." As Gooms said it, he took a white plaster sculpture from under his greatcoat and laid it on the table. The object was a man's face in repose. The nose was aquiline, the skin smooth and unlined. It was the death mask of a man in his late twenties.

"You are quite expert in the art of death masks, Gooms. Is that one of your services to clients?" Cork asked.

"No, sir, it's more trouble than it's worth to me, but the Governor has ordered that one be made of every executed criminal."

I shot a quick glance in Cork's direction, but he ignored me. Just six months ago he had suggested this method of verifying the death of criminals to Major Philip Tell, a special King's agent at large. I could see that Tell had wasted no time in turning Cork's advice to his own advantage. However, I could not fault the Major, for I could see little profit in the business. Cork was speaking again. "And this, you say, is Arthur Briddleton's face?"

"Well, sir," Simon Cratch's voice boomed over us like cannon fire, "that's the heart of the matter, so to speak. I say that's *not* the face of the man called Briddleton who I hanged on Monday last, and Mr. Gooms insists that it is."

"Nay, Mr. Cratch, that's not correct. I claim that is the death mask of the body I picked up at the gibbet at Landsdown crossing at sundown on Monday last. I never knew Arthur Briddleton and could not swear what he looked like. I say the man hanging there bore the face you see in the mask."

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"Gentlemen," Cork said, raising an open palm, "if you will let me ask a few questions to put the problem in its traces, I think we can be of help. Would you care for a drink?"

Gooms said no, but Cratch eyed the bottle near Cork's plate of clams. "Would that be vinegar I smell, sir?"

Cork nodded. "Yes, I believe a red wine gone sour, and quite tart."

"Then I'll happily take a cup. Helps with the heat."

My own mouth felt like cotton as I watched him drink down the acetose liquid and wondered if indeed it did keep one cool. Cork proceeded with a methodical interrogation, from which I have summarized the following.

On the previous Sunday (this being a Thursday evening), a stranger to the locality, who gave his name as Arthur Briddleton, was seized while stealing a horse in an inland village known as Landsdown. He was immediately brought to the local Justice of the Peace, who tried and convicted him. The punishment, as usual, was hanging. There was some argument about executing a man on the Sabbath, and it was decided to hold it on the following day.

"And most fortunate for Briddleton at that," Cratch said. "I was on my way up from Waverly to take ship at Brunswick for England when I heard there was supposed to be a hanging at Landsdown. Believe me, I'm not one to miss a fee. Lucky lad, Briddleton."

"Lucky?" I echoed unconsciously.

"Certainly, Mr. Oaks," Cratch said with a wink. "A man condemned to death can suffer on the string, for if the noose is applied by some amateur, the hanging can be most unpleasant. But old Simon Cratch was handy, and he went swiftly and sweetly. But that mask isn't Arthur Briddleton."

"And just what did your Briddleton look like?" Cork asked.

"Well, the first thing I noticed when I happened to stop by Gooms's shop and saw the mask was that the scar along the left cheek was missing. Then the nose was different. This one is quite pointed, whereas the nose of the man on the gallows was flat-like."

"Of course this was a public execution," Cork said.

"Out in the open, but with no witnesses except the J.P., Bill Tooks. Folks want justice, gentlemen, but they don't like to see it dispatched. I put him on the string about two in the afternoon

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and went my way, for I had the ship to catch. As luck would have it, I missed her. Now, by the look you're aiming at me, Captain, I know you're asking yourself, was the man dead, and I can assure you he was. I've put fifty men on the derrick in my day, and not a manjack of them ever walked away." He sat back with a self-satisfied smug, "I'll take some more of that vinegar, if you please, sir. It's got a fine bite."

Cork refilled the cup and turned to Zachary Gooms. "Now will you tell your part in all this?"

"Glad to," the gravesman said, clearing his throat. "When I heard the nine tolls plus one for a dead man on the Landsdown bell, I knew I was needed for a felon burial. It's part of my contract to care for public graves, and when the bell is rung nine times and one, it's to tell me to come at sundown. The body is left on the gibbet till that time as an example, although most people avoid the Crossing when a body has swung.

"Well, sir, I took my cart out there to that deserted gibbet and brought the corpse back to Brunswick. As I was passing through the delta road by your bottom acreage, Mr. Smyth, I came upon a group of your nigras dancing and cavorting in a grove just off the road. It was like a witch's sabbath, it was, with drums and rattles and the like. Most hellish.

"I can't tell you how uneasy I was, and I gave the horse a crack to get out of the neighbourhood, for I wanted no truck with black devils. Then, damnation, my old Ned rears up and pushes the cart into a gulley. The noises attracted the nigras, and they came running to see. I'll say this for your boys, Mr. Smyth, they were most helpful. They got the cart back on the road and I was off like cannon-shot. I got back to Brunswick, made the mask, and buried the body outside town to the west, in the poor field, in an unmarked grave. The face you see in that mask is the face of the man I buried. I swear to it, sir!"

Tolliver Smyth, who had been sitting with his booted feet spread in front of him during the narration, now stood up menacingly. "Are you implying that my slaves had something to do with this?"

"Now, Mr. Smyth, sir," Gooms said hesitantly, "I just state the facts."

"Despite the heat," Cork put in, "let's keep cool heads. Did you look at the corpse when you took it down at the gibbet, Gooms?"

"It was hard to see in lanternlight, Captain. The first good look

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I got of him was when I reached my shop."

"Then the bodies could have been switched on the gibbet," Cork suggested.

"Switched!" Gooms said in confusion, "I never thought of that. I thought those black devils put a spell on the body. You know, used magic."

"Gooms," Cork said, "it is best to look to reality for an answer before bringing in the occult. Consider your own precarious position, sir. You bury a body that does not resemble the hanged man. That, my lad, is suspicious."

Gooms was visibly disturbed. "Why would I do anything like that? I made the mask, didn't I?"

"Of course, but you assumed that Cratch would be off to England and the J.P. at Landsdown would never see the mask, since it would be sent to the officials in Savannah."

"I beg you, sir," the gravesman pleaded, "I am an honest man."

"And you shall have a chance to prove it."

"Thank God for that," Gooms said fervently, "but how can I?"

"With the greatest ease—by resurrection." As Cork said the word, a sudden silence fell over the company. Gooms looked horrified, and Cratch—yes, even that grim hangman seemed uneasy. Tolliver Smyth was shocked. For myself, I was appalled.

"Dig up the body?" I said. "Why, that's sacrilegious!"

"Well, my fellows, you can't have it both ways," the Captain admonished us all. "We have a dispute over identity, so we must let the corpse speak for itself."

"Begging the Captain's pardon," Cratch said, "I'm as hard a man as any—but resurrection! I'd as soon forget the whole affair. In fact, the more I look at this mask, the only thing different is the scar and the nose."

"But I can't forget it; nor can you, Smyth," Cork said. "These fellows have made a serious accusation against your slaves, and it's bound to start disquieting rumours. No, the body *must* be resurrected at once. Let's see, buried just four days ago. Hmmm, should be still in fine condition for identification."

"Well, an official will have to pass on it," Gooms said humbly. "I'm all for it, but I'll not take it on my own head."

"To be sure. Let us keep it legal," Cork advised. "And who better to order Briddleton resurrected than the man who sentenced him to the grave? Now get you both to this J.P. and resolve the issue."

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Both men got up to leave when Cork stopped them. "Oh, yes, you lads had better leave the death mask here, for safekeeping."

After our eerie visitors had left, Smyth suggested we turn in, for we had a long day ahead of us in the rice fields. I was all for it and, despite the heat, dropped off to sleep in minutes. It was still dark of night when I sat bolt upright in bed, a hand covering my mouth.

"By Jerusalem, Oaks, be quiet," Cork's voice whispered. "Come, get dressed, we have work to do."

Minutes later we were out of the main house, prowling about the outbuildings. We came upon a small shed, and Cork slipped inside, returned in a trice, and tapped my shoulder. "Come in, I've found it," he said.

Once inside he shut the door and relit a candle. It was nothing more than a workshed, quite like any that one would expect to find on a self-sustaining plantation which makes everything from shoes to shingles for itself. I watched the Captain as he uncovered a barrel of chalky white powder and scooped some into a bowl. To this he added water from a bucket in a corner, and proceeded to beat the mixture into a paste.

"It is fortunate that the Smyth main house has plaster walls, and that the materials are at hand," Cork said.

He dumped the paste onto a worktable, and then, to my surprise, took the Briddleton mask from inside his shirt. He lay the mask next to the heap of white paste and began to shape the stuff into a facsimile, smoothing the features of a face on it. I watched him work in silence, and after half an hour he stepped back and cupped his bearded chin with his hand, as if admiring a masterpiece.

"If your creation is supposed to match the original, I can assure you that you are no sculptor, Captain."

"It will do. Same general shape, similar nose, eyes. Yes, it will do fine. Now this will have to dry before we can move it." He picked up the original and tucked it back into his shirt. "Now we shall take a little stroll, old son," he said, going out into the moonlit, drum-beating night.

We were only ten yards from the workshed when he stopped and put both hands to his mouth, one cupped over the other, and delivered the most perfect imitation of a lake loon I have ever heard. I have tried it myself several times and failed, to Tunxis' amusement, for this is how the savage and Cork sometimes com-

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municate. At the edge of a clearing I could hear the return call and knew that Tunxis was nearby. Cork walked off to meet him. When he returned to me, I said, "This is all so befuddling."

"That is because your mind is on other things. Come, our stroll is not over."

I followed him across the clearing into the underbrush, and ten minutes later found myself in a deep swamp, gingerly trodding along a hummock that snaked its way across the dark black water, hiding God knows what in its depths. Ahead of us the drums grew louder. I was amazed at the way Cork so assuredly picked his way along, till I realized that Tunxis must have marked the trail for him. We stopped for a moment while he got his bearings, and I asked him where we were headed.

"One of the sad thoughts in my life, Oaks, is that my adventures have kept you from romance. Tonight we shall rectify the oversight. Ah, there are lights ahead, and our destination."

The hummock suddenly broadened into a small island that rose slowly out of the swamps. Giant mangroves tentacled out of the water to make it a fortress, an evil bastion.

When we came into the clearing, the drums suddenly stopped. A group of black men and women were sitting by a fire, looking at us in wonderment. A huge muscular fellow rose slowly to his feet and came towards us.

"Why, it's the Cappin' who's visitin' the mastah," he said with a smile of relief. "You musta lost your way. Load a danger in the swamp at night, sirs. Come, I take you back so's you don't get ate by a 'gator."

"You are called Big Blue, I believe. I saw you this afternoon in the fields. You're a good worker."

The man smiled at the flattery. "Big Blue worth ten men, the mastah say. Make's Big Blue head man. Come, I take you back, sirs."

"No. First I must see the *mambo*."

Big Blue's amiable face froze in terror. "No *mambo* here at Finderlay, sir. No *vodo*. No priest woman, no sir."

"A *zohop* then, one who knows the plants and leaves. My friend here is in need of *vervain*." As he said it, he placed his hands over his heart and feigned a swoon, which brought hearty laughter from the campfire. Although it broke the tension, I didn't like having it done at my expense. I assumed *vervain* had something to do with the romance he had alluded to.

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Amid all the laughter an ancient negress emerged from the shack and sat herself on a tree stump. She was old and wizened; a bright red bandanna covered her head, while a gingham shawl hid her shrunken body. She let out a cackle and motioned us forward.

When we reached her, Cork bowed slightly and handed her two coins. "This is Mamabin," Big Blue said. "Very old, very much head for dreams."

The crone looked up at Cork and told him, "You are as high as a tree, which means your head always clear. How do you come by the tongue of the swamps?"

"I have put time in the Indies, old mother."

"Pirate?" she shouted.

"No, mother, a traveller. Please, a *vervain* for my friend."

She cocked an eye at me and looked me over from head to toe. "Hard to do, hard to do, but we try." She put her hand into a grass-woven satchel at her feet and took out a handful of leaves. She scrutinized her palm and then selected five leaves of equal size and handed them to me. They were nothing more than oleander leaves.

"Pin one each to the corner of your pillow and one in the center. Then you sleep and dream of lady you will marry." It was all nonsense, but I took them and thanked her.

"Tell me, old mother," Cork said, "what is the way to make a zombi walk?"

She immediately cringed, and he was quick to calm her.

"I know you don't make zombi, but I have great interest, and it may help your master."

"Masta Tolliver good man," she said. "No whips here at Finderlay. Make Blue head man. Good masta. Someone has spell on him?"

"Not yet, but in case it happens."

"They say make zombi drink salt water and he speak."

"You are very wise, old mother. I am told you can make zombi if you hang a dead man from his heels and take three drops from his nose."

She tossed her head back and cackled. "That would be a pizen, child."

"Or is it a pin stuck into a lime while still on the tree from sunup to sunup and then squeezing the juice?"

She cackled again. "More pizen."

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"Or is it the black-leaf tea, old mother?"

At this remark she went silent. "Houngan. You houngan."

"I know more of magic than these people should hear, old mother. Come, let us go inside where we can talk."

He was in with her for almost half an hour, while I stood in the campfire-lit grove a bit uneasily. He finally came out, and we left the place hurriedly. Once back at the main plantation, we picked up the now dry, rude copy of the death mask, and crept up to our rooms.

"I take it she is a witch of some kind," I said to him before going into my own bedchamber.

"More an herbal magician, or a *docteur feuilles*, as the French colonists call them. These old tribal rites and beliefs brought over from Africa have been diluted and fragmented by time and locale, but the basics are still there. That's what I was after to-night."

"And did you get it?"

"Sweet dreams, old son," he said, shutting his door.

All this confusion had muddled my mind, and only sleep could clear it. I fell asleep for the second time that night with a bit of difficulty, for the oleander leaves on my pillow kept scratching my ear.

For the next two days we heard nothing from Cratch or Gooms and had little time to think of their problem. We were up with the sun and into the rice fields, where Cork made elaborate calculations and closely observed the method of harvesting. I spent most of my time swatting bugs. Each night Cork spent long hours at his drawings, leaving me to bide my time with Tolliver Smyth, who proved to be a well-read fellow.

Even Saturday night could not drag the Captain from his work, and Smyth and I repaired to drink once again on the verandah.

"One of my men, Big Blue, tells me that you paid a visit to the old woman in the swamps," he said, lighting a seegar. "Best be careful back in there. Hundred of quicksand places that could swallow a man for ever."

I shuddered inwardly and thanked the Lord for Tunxis' trailblazing ability. I hadn't seen the savage since that night, and wondered where he was off to. But he does that now and again, so I paid it no heed.

"I'm afraid your visit has spoiled me, for I shall miss our talks and fellowship when you are gone," Smyth said.

"Not many neighbours?"

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"These plantations are so vast that there is little sociality, and then in the small villages they don't take to strangers, at least not to me."

"They think you are too easy on the slaves?"

"Yes. Always talk of keeping them down for fear of an uprising. If the poor devils do a day's work, let them be. But then maybe it's me personally they don't like. After all, Bill Tooks is as new out here as I am, and the locals took to him like a duck to water. Elected him J.P. and all that."

"Never confuse competence with popularity." We looked up to see Cork coming out onto the verandah from the house. "It is one of the flaws of the human race. We seem to have visitors, gentlemen."

Out in the darkness was the sound of horse hooves, and one of the house slaves ran into the yard with a torch illuminating the arriving party. Three men were ahorse—Gooms, Cratch, and an unknown man. The fourth person on foot was known well to me.

"Take a care, sirs!" Cork shouted. "That's a war chief of the Quinnipiac you have bound by rope and lead on a halter."

"Runaway slave from the West Indies, if I have it right," growled the stranger. He was a fierce man with a black beard and wore rough back-country clothes. Smyth got to his feet and was seemingly about to corroborate Cork, when the Captain stopped him.

"Never shout a truth when you can exhibit it," he said to our host. "Very well, sir, you operate at your own peril."

Then, to Tunxis he said something in Indian jabber, and in a second the redskin's hands were not only free, but whipping the tether and the stranger from his horse.

"Help the gentlemen up, Tunxis, and dust him off a bit. I suggest you let him do it, sir, for he could have your scalp in a trice if he cared to."

"It's all right, Bill, the Indian is with Captain Cork!" Smyth shouted.

There was much swearing from Justice of the Peace Tooks as the three men climbed to the verandah. Cork went into the yard and talked with Tunxis, who handed him a piece of paper he had concealed in his moccasin.

Tooks was saying, "How was I to know he was a bloody prince or something?" when Cork returned.

"No harm done, Mr. Tooks. An Indian in unfamiliar country

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walking alone is, of course, suspicious, since the redman is used as a slave in the Indies. I can see that you were only doing your duty as a J.P."

This seemed to placate the man for a few moments, and then he became irritable again. "And I'm here to do my duty, I can assure you. These are strange doings indeed. Never saw the like of it. Gooms and Cratch arguing over who's hung and who's buried. I've been off in the wilderness for two days or I'd have been on this sooner. I'm not opening a man's grave, felon or not, until I find out which one's lying. I'm told you have the death mask, Cork, and I want it produced now."

"Of course, Justice Tooks, I'll fetch it and along the way I'll make you some of my own Apple Knock. Would you rather have more vinegar, Mr. Cratch?"

The hangman smiled. "I'm not against a bit of liquor, sir."

Cork asked me to assist him, and, as we left the verandah, Tooks was growling at Smyth, "If any of your damned darkies had anything to do with this, they'll all hang."

Once inside, Cork sent me to his room to get the mask. He was mixing the Knock when I returned below stairs. How he expected to pass off this childish copy as a death mask, I had no idea. I was preceding him out the door when he tripped me and sent me sprawling forward. The mask flew from my hands and smashed to pieces.

"Oaks, you jackanapes!" he shouted at me. "Now look what you've done. You'll be flogged for this!"

"Is that the mask?" Tooks cried.

"*Was* the mask, I'm afraid, Mr. Justice," Cork apologized. "You must forgive this menial of mine."

I was stunned at such treatment from the man I considered my friend. Seeing my anger, Cork admonished me, "Hold your tongue, man, that's an order!"

"Now that's done it." Tooks was red with anger. "Now I'll have to open the grave."

"I think not, sir," Cork said, handing the drinks around. "The explanation to this is quite simple. Tell me, Mr. Cratch, when did you arrive at Landsdown?"

"Why, Sunday in the forenoon, right after the trial."

"And how did you spend your time, sir? The hanging wasn't until Monday afternoon, which in itself is strange, since executions are normally at dawn."

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"I'll tell you what he did, he got himself drunk as a lord." Tooks pointed a finger at Cratch. "Couldn't get the sot awake till almost one on Monday. I wouldn't have paid him a fee in advance if I knew he was a drunkard."

"So we have a bleary-eyed rumpot who says the man hanged is not the man buried. Your proclivity for vinegar is not uncommon among men who drink too much, Cratch. It is the fool's notion that acid thins the blood and makes one sober. In the Pennsylvania colony sauerkraut juice is the common remedy."

"You mean all this trouble was caused by a drunken hangman?" Tooks was now livid. "By thunderation I'll put *him* on the gibbet, I will!"

"Have a care, Mr. Justice, you may not be so lucky next time."

"Lucky? What do you mean, lucky?"

"Well, Mr. Tooks—" Cork took a piece of paper from his pocket "—two days ago I dispatched my Indian friend to Savannah by coaster with an accurate description of the death mask. Now in my report to the Governor, I failed to mention that you tried Arthur Briddleton on a Sunday, which is illegal, and thus so was his sentence. I did not mention that you might have committed judicial murder, for it was not my purpose to bring the Royal Governor down on your head. I have an interest in this death-mask system, sir, because I am its inventor. Well, lo and behold, you are a bit of a hero, for Tunxis brings me word that you have successfully tried, convicted, and hung none other than Black Jack Herleigh."

"The escaped highwayman? My word!" Tooks beamed. "He was one of the blackguards mentioned in the Escape Commission's proclamation. Think of it, gentlemen—me, Bill Tooks, captured and hung a notorious robber that all the King's men couldn't keep or find!"

He took a long draught to his success from his Knock and smiled anew. Suddenly, in the instant of a swallow, his face went white and he fell forward on the floor.

"Quick, you two! To the well for cool water!"

"It's no use, Captain Cork," the gravesman said, looking down at Tooks's face. "I knows a corpse when I sees one."

"I said water and fast!" Cork said with a roar that sent both men scurrying outside.

Smyth bent over the body, rolled back the eyelids, then put his head to Tooks's chest.

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"Too much excitement, I would guess," Cork said.

Smyth got to his feet and rushed indoors, mumbling, "Damn fool." He returned seconds later and poured liquid from a small blue philtre into Tooks's mouth. The man's eyes began to flutter and his breath came heavy at first and then steadied.

"You're all right, Mr. Tooks," Cork said, kneeling down. "You've had a bit of a fright, that's all. You should take things easier in the future, for I think you may have some trouble with your heart."

Within the hour the Justice of the Peace was on his feet again and as feisty as ever. "You, Cratch, had better be on the next boat out of Brunswick, if you know what's good for you. And you, Zachary Gooms, help me to home. I'm sorry to have caused you trouble, Tolliver. Drop over soon to meet the folks at Landsdown. There's a young widow I'd like you to meet."

When the hoofbeats were out of earshot, we all sat down again to our drinks and relaxed.

"Well, I must say all's well that ends well," I chuckled. "But this affair must have had little zest for you, Captain, since it proved to be no puzzle at all."

He gave me that smirk-a-mouth. "More of a puzzle than you think, old son." He turned to Smyth. "Why don't you take off the false beard, Black Jack? Your own must be grown in fairly well by now."

"Black Jack? Black Jack Herleigh? Come now, Captain."

Then, before my eyes, the planter removed his thick beard and revealed a good seven-days' growth.

"When did you get on to me?" he asked.

"I was sure when you went for the antidote to the datura and gave it to Tooks. If you hadn't, I would have administered my own concoction."

I was astounded. "I don't understand this at all. Isn't Herleigh supposed to be in his grave?"

"Hold fast, Oaks. Let us start from the beginning. You will recall when Cratch and Gooms first brought us the problem, I offered the simplest of solutions. One body, probably Briddleton's, was replaced by another. But whose, and, more pointedly, why? The who, of course, would have required clairvoyance; the why, however, although a puzzling question, was not beyond *all* conjecture."

"Well, I've thought about that," I said, "and fell upon the idea

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that someone had been murdered and that his corpse had somehow gotten into Gooms's hands for a legal burial."

"Then you didn't think hard enough, Oaks. A murdered corpse could be hidden eternally in the quicksand of the swamps. No, the purpose of the replacement was one of *identity*. Either to hide Briddleton's or to expose the face on the mask. And the answer leans to the latter in light of the Escape Commission's imminent arrival. Briddleton was a complete stranger hereabouts with no friends to identify him. And even if he were an escaped felon, what could be gained by hiding his identity after death?"

"And that's why you sent the original mask to Savannah?" I asked.

Smyth-Herleigh looked agitated. "I thought you said you sent a description, and that those smashed bits of plaster are the remains of the mask."

"A mere diversion, Jack Herleigh, or should I say Tolliver Smyth, for you are for ever safe in your new identity. The Commission has now written you off as dead, and will not look for a man who has been officially buried. Hanged and buried. You can be assured that Tooks is so inflated by his capturing and hanging a notorious highwayman that nothing could convince him to the contrary. Black Jack Herleigh is 'dead.' "

"But that's what I don't understand," I said. "If Herleigh—that is, Smyth—posed as a corpse to have his freshly-shaved face cast in a mask, how could he fool a gravesman?"

"Because to all intents and purposes he *was* dead, Oaks. He was a zombi until his slaves could dig him out of the grave and put Briddleton's body in his place."

"A zombi? Why, zombis are mere superstition!"

"To the uninitiated, yes, but a person can be suspended in a catatonic death-like trance with any of several tropical drugs. In South America it is curare; in Hispaniola, datura is used."

"Or mancenillier," Smyth-Herleigh interjected.

"I see you know herbal medicine as well as Mamabin."

"Not really, but she made the sleep draught for me when I learned of the Escape Commission's coming. I was a wild lad in the old days, and took to the highway more for the adventure than for the profit. I never killed anyone, despite the reports of my savagery. My main sin seems to have been escaping from Newgate and cheating the hangman. Out here I planned a new life."

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"And you have it, sir."

"Thanks to you, yes. When I learned that a man near my age and build was going to be hanged in Landsdown, I saw my chance to throw the Escape Commission off my trail, so I took the draught and had the slaves put my 'dead' body in place of Briddleton's during the slaves' diversion on the Delta road. But how could you know it was my face in the mask? I had to shave clean for the death mask. Is this false beard so bad?"

"No," Cork said, "it's quite good, in fact. Until Tunxis returned, I had no inkling of a man named Black Jack Herleigh. But I did suspect that the affair had something to do with a run-away criminal, and both yourself and Tooks were new to the neighbourhood. I decided on you, for Tooks, in his official capacity, could have made a mask of his own face and sent it along to Savannah without any hanging at all. You proved your mettle to-night when you gave Tooks the antidote for the death-sleep potion I put in his Knock."

"I thought Neela had done it to protect me."

"Your slaves think well of you, Smyth, and I suspect your attitude comes from having spent some time in chains yourself. If you perfect this new scheme of mine for rice production, you may well have no need for them. What the devil are you doing, Oaks?"

"I'm rubbing my shin where you tripped me."

"Sorry, old son, but I had to trip you. It was necessary to the charade."

I was truly touched until he gave me that smirk-a-mouth again.

"Of course, you can trot off to the swamps and have Mamabin fix you a poultice. And while you're there, have her give you new oleander leaves for your pillow. The old ones have scratched the back of your neck, and you are dreaming of the wrong things."

I decided to ignore him, but he is uncanny. How could he know that I had dreamed of my account books?

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JERROLD PHAON

"He knew a lot about pain: it was something he'd lived with for so long that he'd forgotten what it was like to live without feeling empty and frozen and hurting inside." A searing story . . .

THE CLIMBER

by JERROLD PHAON

The car door flew open on impact, and the boy was thrown into the ditch. He landed face down in the snow, the air momentarily knocked out of him. His chest hurt where it had struck the steering wheel and the side of his face was numb. He tasted metal inside his mouth, felt the jagged ridge of skin when he ran his tongue along his lower lip. But his brain was surprisingly clear: he could hear the car engine still running, could hear his own heavy breathing filling the stillness of the night.

He brought himself to his hands and knees and crawled forward, then rolled onto his back. He looked up at the sky. It was still overcast, but at least the snow had stopped. His car was about three feet away, a black silhouette against the gray-white of fresh snow. It leaned nose-first into the ditch, the rear wheel nearer him off the ground. He knew it would be useless to try and get the car going again.

He struggled to his feet and staggered through the snow to his car. The door was still open and he leaned inside and switched off the ignition: the grumbling noise of the engine deserted him like lost hope. Then he retrieved his rifle from the floor.

The movement brought new pain shooting through his chest. He strapped the rifle diagonally across his back, then drew the sling tight. The pressure of the strap eased the pain in his chest. With considerable effort he managed to climb out of the ditch and walk up the road to the base of the mountain, where two ridges fell away to make a narrow gap.

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He chose the western ridge, knowing it really didn't make much difference. It would be a steep difficult climb no matter which way he went, and he knew they'd find his car and his tracks and come after him. But he felt he'd have a better chance on the western ridge. He knew the trail better in that direction from hunting along it and the hike to Logan's Gap was only ten miles. If he made it there was a chance he could steal a car and keep going.

He started climbing. The slope was smooth and shiny, with scattered dark patches of boulders and scrub brush sticking out of the snow. Farther up was a tree line and he knew if he could get that far he'd manage to find the trail, even in the snow.

The climb proved not as difficult as he thought it would be. The snow was soft, and the ground beneath was firm. He managed to get footholds on boulders and scrub, but he had to stop often and rest. He had a hard time catching his breath, and the pain in his chest kept getting stronger. Below he could see a dark flat patch that was his car next to the white snow-covered line of highway that went through the gap. He realized he hadn't gone very far, even though it seemed as if he'd been climbing for a long time.

He remembered looking up at the moutain that morning. It seemed so different then, not nearly so vast. A narrow red band was emerging behind the eastern ridge and throwing out a fierce glow like radiation, driving away the dull-gray pallor of predawn.

The mountain always looked different when viewed from a distance. There was something mysterious and unreachable about it. He'd climbed it and hunted on it for years, had learned its trails and springs, had tramped over nearly every inch of it tracking a single deer, and he knew that up close the mountain was just rocks and scrub and trees, and in the midst of it all, it provided him with the same kind of shelter and refuge it offered the deer and possum he hunted. Sometimes he would go out to an outcropping of rock called the Point and look down at the town below, and everything down there looked different, smaller and less important.

The cold started to soak into him and he forced himself to get moving again. The entire day had been cold, bitter cold. In the morning, when the alarm had wakened him for work, he lay in bed and listened to the wind rattle the branches of a tree that grew too close to the house. He was unwilling to burst his snug cocoon of covers and dress in the icy room. But he got up, finally, dressing quickly in the darkness, and hurried downstairs. His

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mother was in the kitchen, packing his lunch. He said, "It smells in here."

She didn't answer. She continued wrapping sandwiches, her shoulders stooped from too many years of bending long hours over a sewing machine. She had difficulty wrapping the sandwiches, and when she brought his lunch pail to the table he noticed that her hands were withered and inflamed with arthritis. He felt impatient with her—she'd been cheated by time and the loss of those things he held timeless.

He was only eight when Butchie Walters told him his mother would die one day, and the thought that she would be put into a hole and covered up, that her skin would turn black and rot, had frightened him and filled him with disgust. Seeing her hands now, and the hopelessness in her eyes, had brought back that feeling. The heavy smell of fuel oil that filled the house pressed on him.

"You got to go down cellar and check the tank once in a while," he told her. "When it's low you got to call for a delivery. You know *he* won't do it."

"I'll call the oil man before I go to work."

He grunted and spooned through his cereal. "Did you hear him when he came in this morning?"

"No." She was washing dishes now, her arms pumping up and down in the sudsy water. Soap fluff clung to her elbow.

"It was three thirty," he said. "I heard him stumbling on the stairs. He was drunk."

She didn't answer. He pushed his bowl back, stood up, put on his parka, and picked up his lunch pail. He lit a cigarette. "One of these days I'm going to lay him out for coming home that way."

Unexpectedly his mother whirled on him, flinging soap suds against the refrigerator. "Don't talk like that, Jesse! He's still your father."

He knew he'd gone too far, but he felt committed to the feeling and refused to back off. He said, "I don't have no father."

She slapped him, knocking the cigarette from his mouth. He backed away from her and touched his cheek with his hand. For a moment he thought he might hit her back. But she remained in front of him, unmoving, her narrow face set in tight lines. He reached down, picked up his cigarette, and crushed it on the linoleum under his shoe. "Aw, why don't you clean up this pigsty," he said.

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He was sorry now that he'd said it, after everything that had happened. It was one of the things he thought about during the climb. The moon came out of the haze and lit up the snow and he tried to concentrate on digging through the light surface crust, on working his way diagonally across the ridge toward the tree line that loomed dark and solid above him; and all the while his body worked, his mind kept going over all the things he'd said that could never be unsaid, the things he'd done he could never undo. He realized his hands were numb from clawing through the snow at the frozen earth and he had to fight the urge to stop and warm them. It was too late to go back to his car and get his gloves. It was too late for a lot of things. He had to keep pushing.

In school, in the principal's office, Mr. Carstairs had told him he was always pushing in the wrong direction. "You won't rise in this world if you keep the attitude that the world is against you, Jesse." That had been after the incident in the cafeteria lunch line. He'd filled his tray, and when he reached the lady at the cash register he said, "Put it on my bill," the way he always did, making a joke out of it to hide his embarrassment. He'd been charging his lunch for nearly two weeks to save enough money to fix his car.

"I'm sorry," the checker said. "You owe too much." She thrust a slip of paper at him. His name was scrawled on it with a column of figures below that tallied to $4.05. He didn't want to look at the paper. He wanted to get through the line, sit down, eat. He said, "What?"

"You owe too much." She was a heavy Dutch woman who spoke with flattened vowels and thick consonants. "No more credit," she said firmly.

"I'll settle up tomorrow."

The line was getting impatient. The boy behind him nudged him with his tray and said, "C'mon, Lambert. Don't be a cheapskate."

He turned. "Don't push me, man!"

The checker said, "If you can't pay, you should go to the office. Fill out a paper—"

"I'm not a damn welfare case!"

"C'mon, Lambert," the boy said again.

He could hear the others in the line begin to titter. Someone said, "*Lamb*-bert, *La-aamb*-bert!" and made a noise like a sheep. He whirled and heaved his tray at the line. Some girls screamed,

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the boys ducked. Creamed cabbage and apple crisp hit the stainless-steel serving counter. The tray clattered to the floor. Then Mr. Carstairs came out of the teachers' dining room and hauled him down to the office. "This black mark on your record will follow you the rest of your life, Jesse."

It didn't seem to matter now, with the dark tree line looming above him. He grabbed onto a sapling, a young birch that was bent and twisted under the weight of snow, and pulled himself up. He stopped to catch his breath and rub his frozen hands.

The base was far below him now, a black pool that seemed to have no shore. The pain he felt seemed no longer important, and he forced himself forward again, stumbling and groping and driving himself by sheer effort of will. The brush snapped in his face, flinging snow down his back and momentarily blinding him, but it was no longer necessary to see: he had entered the darkness of the tree line, the snow had faded, the moon was just a dull glint above the limbs.

Crazy things went through his head: he saw the dangling cord of the air conditioner, unplugged, in Mr. Williams' office. It seemed more important now than anything Williams had to say, as though the unplugged cord of the air conditioner told it all: there is no waste here.

"I'm sorry," Mr. Williams had said. He slid back on his chair which was on casters and rolled easily on the tiled floor.

"When do you think you'll call me back?"

"Hard to say, Jesse. Very difficult to say right now. Perhaps in the spring."

He realized then that he'd been laid off. So that part of his life was over too: not that it had ever been an important job. He was just a service man on Frame Two, where he watched the cloth grow larger on the rolls, waiting for the hiss of air and the metallic *schrank* of the blade that cut the cloth. Then he would pull the roll off the machine and lift an empty bar into place. It was an endless cycle of waiting, pulling, lifting, trimming, tagging, and taping an endless cycle of cloth. Dull work. Tedious. But it wasn't endless. He knew that now. He was without a job.

He didn't realize he'd reached the summit until he came to a powerline that crossed the ridge. The trees were cut away in a clean even sweep down both sides of the mountain and the wind rushed at him, tore at his parka. He crossed quickly to the other side of the line, to the shelter of the trees, where he hunched up

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and blew on his hands again, rubbing them, trying to bring back some feeling. He thought about building a fire, but there wasn't time for that, he wasn't hunting now. He would have to move to keep warm.

He started looking for the trail, but he had difficulty finding it in the snow and darkness. He remembered one winter when he'd come up here and hunted along the crest of the mountain. It was bright then, and he'd found the trail quite easily. The brush formed a perfect canopy over it, and the sun glinted off the ice so that it seemed as if he were walking through a crystal tunnel.

Now the light from the moon cast deceptive shadows and he groped for nearly an hour until he found a spot where the snow was kicked up and the brush pushed aside. A small herd of deer had come through, probably on their way to a small spring that trickled out of the mountain on the other side of the Point.

He moved through the trees on instinct, drawing on his knowledge from other hunting trips, trying to remember the turns and the draws and the inclines. When the trees started to break away on his left, he realized he was on the right track, that the trail was taking him along the crest to the Point. His confidence returned.

Sometimes he felt his instincts were all he had, a sense of truth that was basic and simple, an integral part of whatever he was. What he'd done earlier, the patterns of his entire life up to that moment, up to *this* moment, was instinctive. He was alone now. No one could help him.

Not even Morano. He'd spent the afternoon at Morano's service station after leaving the plant. He'd thought about asking for his old part-time job back, but Morano wasn't having an easy time, either: inflation had hurt him and he was forced to run his small place without help. So he spilled his change onto the glass top of the pinball machine and fed it a dime. The lights went on.

Morano came into the office and wiped his hands on a red cloth. "Hey, Jesse, what you doing here?"

He didn't answer. He pulled the plunger and sent a ball into play. The machine began to clack and bang as the ball rolled off the bumpers and dropped down to the flippers. He caught it before it sank and sent it back into play, into a banger. It shot off fast and came down. He missed and the ball dropped through.

"Saw your Dad's truck outside Lawson's Tavern," Morano said conversationally. "He out of work again?"

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On the last ball he had a score of 1200 and he worked the machine hard for the 400 more points he needed to win a free game. But the ball kept falling, and each time he sent it back into play it circled around for the small tallies, always missing the 50-point special. Finally the ball dropped through to the left and he lost it. The cabinet lights clicked off.

Morano shook his head. "Bad day," he said.

The trail began an incline and he stumbled over boulders hidden in the snow. He slowed down and placed his feet carefully, letting all his weight fall on one leg before moving the other one forward. It felt funny to walk because his feet were numb, and the only sensation he recognized was pressure, something solid beneath him. Then the boulders got larger and the trees drew back.

He was now at the Point, an outcropping of rock overlooking the town. He moved more carefully over the slippery rocks, his knees bent, his arms loose at his sides, ready to break a fall. He stopped for a moment and looked down. There was a cast to the black sky, a glowing halo thrown up by the streetlamps of the town below, and seeing it took his breath away. He had never seen the town like that before, and he felt above it and beyond it, away finally. He had a feeling of power.

Stronger even than the power he'd felt earlier when the rifle had recoiled against his body. The feeling had been building all day, growing stronger in him. Williams didn't count, his job didn't count, even his mother, standing over her hot stove, preparing supper for his father—even she didn't count any more. None of them counted: they were as alone down there as he was up here, on his mountain.

He remembered sitting at the supper table, his mother serving him. She didn't speak. The defeat and humiliation that she wore like a mask infuriated him. "Why do you put up with it?" he said. "Why don't you fight back?"

"Got nothing to fight with," she said.

"Then why do you stick around!"

"Got no place to go."

Moving again, over the rocks, he remembered he'd watched television after supper, an old *Star Trek* episode about a lost planet where everything the space travelers imagined became a reality. His father came in then, drunk from spending the day at Lawson's Tavern and talking about all the Germans he'd killed on the road to Rome.

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Then the argument in the kitchen began and he was thinking about that too when the snow started to give way. He felt his balance shift, then he started sliding. He tried to reach out for something, but there was nothing to grab. He went down hard on the rocks and fell into a crevice, landing solidly on an outcropping below.

He felt dizzy from the fall, his head suddenly cluttered with his father's loud ranting. It was a futile argument, the same kind of argument he'd heard hundreds of times before, and he knew they never listened to each other, they simply yelled their lines back and forth, another rerun.

Until he couldn't stand it any longer and he stood in the doorway to the kitchen and shouted at them, "Why don't you just shut up? Just—shut—up!"

That began the fight. His father went after him. He heard his father shout, "I'll teach you!" then felt the sharp blow on the side of his head. He reeled back and toppled onto the floor in the living room. He tried to get back to his feet, but his father was nudging him in the rib cage with his heavy work shoes.

"Get up! Get up!"

"Damn you! Damn—"

He lunged for the foot, caught it. But his father braced himself in the doorway and jammed his shoe hard into Jesse's midsection. Jesse let go and rolled away, hearing his mother scream, "Stop it! For God's sake you're hurting him!"

He knew a lot about pain: it was something he'd lived with for so long that he'd forgotten what it was like to live without feeling empty and frozen and hurting inside. Now, on the ledge, he felt a new pain shooting the length of his body and he thought for a moment he was going to be sick. Then the feeling passed and he took in large gulps of air.

He felt hot. He ran his hand along his leg. The leg was at an odd angle from the rest of his body. He tried not to think about it. The pain wasn't too sharp if he kept still—just a dull throbbing ache.

He managed to work out of the rifle sling so he could rest more comfortably. Then he cradled the rifle in his arms and waited for the pain to die down again. He knew that before long he would get used to it. He knew that from experience—no matter how severe the pain, you always get used to it.

After a while the fuzziness left his head and he started to feel

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calm. He looked up. The top ledge was only four feet above him, but it was still too far away. He'd reached his limit; he could climb no higher . . .

"Open up!" his father had shouted.

The bedroom door was unlocked. He was backed against the wall, his rifle in his hands. He could still hear the tree banging against the weatherboards outside his window.

The bedroom door flew open. "Don't point that gun at me!"

"It's loaded! Keep away!"

"Why, you—" His father lunged. The boy fired two quick shots that caught his father in the stomach. The old man grunted and fell forward, across the bed . . .

They were bound to find his car in the ditch and send a posse out looking for him. They'd have to climb the mountain to get him. He knew now that all he could do was wait—it was all he had left to do. He could die alone up here as well as down there, but he felt that at least up here, on the mountain, he was above it all and he could die fighting it.

He looked down at the lights below, letting them blur in his vision until they became one gigantic glow. It fascinated him.

He began to forget about the cold. He grew sleepy and tried to shake himself out of his stupor. He concentrated on the lights. He knew if he fell asleep he would never wake up; he would freeze to death, he would die and never know it.

He was half delirious when the first light of morning touched him. It was a gray morning, but the cold was a sensation he could no longer feel. He tried to concentrate on the trail where it swung into view parallel with the ledge and listened carefully.

After a while he thought he heard brush snapping and he reached for his rifle, but the feeling was gone from his hands. The rifle slipped and fell off the ledge. He cursed softly, dragged himself to the edge of the rock, and looked over. The rifle hadn't gone far, but it was out of his reach.

He broke a stick off a dead limb and reached out futilely. Then a man wearing a red hunting jacket and holding a rifle stepped into view on the trail. "Hey, you!" he said. "Don't move! Freeze!"

On instinct Jesse pulled up the stick and aimed it at the man. The man fired point-blank. Jesse fell away from the ledge, plunging down, down.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 438th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Bert Bagley knew how to use a knife—he was a butcher by trade . . .

The author, Mark Townley (a pseudonym), has worked mostly in the field of radio. Mark Townley's current project is a full-length biography of the Eighteenth Century astronomer, Caroline Herschel. Perhaps the most interesting work in Mark Townley's background has resulted from being senior writer of CELEBRITY REGISTER *(1973), a large and imposing volume of 562 pages, with a photograph of each celebrity from Aaron, Hank to Zukor, Adolph, the whole edited by Earl Blackwell. Mark Townley "had the fun of putting together the profile of Ellery Queen, of then-Congressman Gerald Ford, and of about 600 others."*

The author's "principal interests center around astronomy, printing on a small hand press, and socializing with two handsome and intelligent orange cats named Otto and Gus." (But what secrets Mr. Townley must know about famous people!)

ON THE NORTH SEA NIGHT FERRY

by MARK TOWNLEY

"Ah choo!"

Bert Bagley, his nose raw-red from sneezing, crumpled up the soggy tissue in his hand, tossed it over the guardrail, and watched it drop to the dark water several decks below.

His cold—and there was no mistaking now that it was a cold—was definitely worse. Three nights earlier, when he had climbed aboard the boat train to Harwich at London's Liverpool Station, he had attributed the slight constriction in his sinuses to nerves, a psychosomatic response to the strain of reining in his

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fears about the project to come. Later, standing on deck as the big North Sea car ferry slid out from the Harwich quay, he had been certain this diagnosis was correct: the stuffiness in his nose was not enough to block out the pungent scent of the salt breeze.

Then the sneezing had begun and when the all-night voyage was over, two chilly wet days in Amsterdam hadn't helped. Now, as the ship glided through the twinkling night-time harbor of Hook of Holland to begin its return trip to England, he could smell nothing at all.

In other circumstances the sneezing would have been merely an uncomfortable nuisance, but now it could be a disaster. Much of the plan's success depended on his blending in unnoticed among the rest of the passengers. One "Ah choo!" too many, one too many sympathetic "Bless you's" from fellow passengers, and he would have a special identity setting him apart. ("That tall dark young man with the cold—he was the one!") Not for the first time on this zigzagging journey Bert Bagley wondered if he was crazy to go on with it. Then he thought of Rosalind Denham and knew he had no choice.

Blowing his nose as unobtrusively as possible, he left the starry darkness of the promenade deck and stepped through the cabin door to join the crowd.

Second-class passengers on the ship had the run of the greater part of three decks above the two levels where lorries and automobiles were stored. Judging from the number of travelers scattered around the big center lounge on B deck, there were more men, women, and children aboard for this westward crossing than there had been on the opposite crossing two nights before. There must, Bagley guessed, be 300 people at least. Maybe more.

The stairs between decks were full of restless wanderers and there were few vacant tables either in the bar or in the cafeteria on the deck below. Already there was a queue forming at the cage on C deck where a purser exchanged Dutch guilders, German marks, and French francs for English pounds. There was a line also at the counter where passengers could buy liquor, cigarettes, and perfume duty-free.

Bagley stopped short. His straight handsome mouth curved downward in a sneer as his eyes fell on a balding, stoop-shouldered man waiting in the queue at the duty-free shop.

Wouldn't you know, Bagley thought. It figures, that's where he'd be. Looking to save a shilling or two on a bottle. It figures.

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It was a frequent complaint of Rosalind Denham that her husband did everything "on the cheap." That was why he chose to take his monthly business trips from London to Amsterdam by train and boat rather than by plane. That was why he customarily rode as a second-class passenger sitting up all night rather than as a first-class passenger with a bunk reservation below.

It was also why—at least, one of the reasons why—Bert Bagley was planning to kill him. It was certainly one of the reasons Rosalind Denham wanted him killed.

At that thought Bert felt a quick shiver along his spine that had nothing to do with his cold. His hand, deep in the right raincoat pocket, closed around a long narrow hard object encased in a handkerchief. He had done a good bit of killing in his time, he thought grimly, not with this knife but with some very much like it. Spring lambs, calves, hogs, not to mention countless chickens on the Devonshire farm where he'd been raised. But he had never before tried to kill a man.

"Ah choo!"

The first sneeze came without warning, but he managed to slip around the corner into a passageway before a second one came. The gray-faced man who was Rosalind Denham's husband seemed too intent on his purchases to be distracted by a sneezing young stranger a dozen paces away, but there was no point in taking any chances.

Glancing at his watch, Bagley strolled into the bar in the bow of the ship. On the crossing to Holland he had permitted himself the indulgence of a nightcap—several nightcaps, in fact—before the bar finally closed at midnight. But all he had wanted to accomplish on that trip was to familiarize himself with his quarry's typical night-ferry routine. This time, when Farley Denham came in to sip his nightly pint of stout, Bert Bagley would be drinking nothing stronger than orange juice.

He reached into his left-hand pocket and pulled out the London tabloid he had bought at the newsstand in the Dutch ferry terminal. A few minutes later Denham came through the door and seated himself at a table in the opposite corner. The older man had scarcely sat down before he stood up again and began walking in Bagley's direction, but he stopped halfway across the room and returned to his seat after picking up a discarded newspaper from a recently vacated table.

Bagley shook his head. Denham, according to his wife, had a

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bank account in six figures. But he was too cheap even to buy his own newspaper. Rosalind hadn't been kidding about that.

Rosalind.

What, Bert wondered, was *she* doing right now, a few hours before the husband she had grown to detest was to be killed? Bert tried to visualize her back in the flat in South Kensington watching the telly or reading one of her rental-library thrillers. Instead, he found himself picturing the highlights of the three months they had known each other.

Rosalind, exotic as some multihued tropical bird, sweeping through the entrance of Gropper's Meat Market on Marylebone High Street and back to the counter where he stood in his white coat and apron with their bloody stains. Bert could still remember his surprise at her extraordinary friendliness and, in that unlikely setting, the inviting scent of her perfume. Away from the shop, in more conventional apparel, it was not at all unusual for him to experience this sense of sudden eager contact with a woman's eyes, but it rarely happened at work with a butcher knife in his hand.

"Cut me two lovely big porkchops," she had told him. "Really lovely ones. The kind you take home to your wife."

"Well, now," Bert had answered, adopting her same bantering tone, "it so happens that I don't have a wife. But I'll give you the sort I might take to my dear old grandmother. She's right fond of porkchops, she is."

That, casual as it was, was the beginning.

And now here he was close to an end that had nothing of casualness about it.

She had become a regular customer after that, stopping in three or four afternoons a week just before closing time. Their banter had continued to be lightly offhand, even as it grew more revealing.

No, she wasn't a fashion model, although she had been one once. Now she worked with her husband, who had his own small import business with an office on Wigmore Street. They lived in a flat in South Kensington, but by the time she got home most of her neighborhood butchers had closed up shop. "And anyhow, now that I've been so spoiled by you, I wouldn't think of going anywhere else."

That was in the first month.

Then came the night when, on his way to the underground sta-

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tion, he had seen her waiting alone at a bus stop. He had stopped to wait with her. She had let it drop, ever so casually, that her husband was off on a business trip and she was bored with the notion of spending a long evening at home alone. A drink? Why not. Something to eat after? Why not.

When they took a taxi later to the South Kensington flat, she had invited him in and he had ended up spending the night.

That was in the second month.

Farley Denham's trips kept him away from London for three nights at a time. On the sixth night they spent together, as they were lying smoking in the darkness, she had surprised him with a question. "Bert, how'd you like to open up your own butcher shop?"

That was all — or almost all — there was to it.

By the third month the plan was under way.

Bert had no illusions about this moody, electric creature being in love with him. He was merely the means to an end. Nothing wrong with that, he thought. The equation worked both ways. She, or more accurately her husband's money, could be his own means to a future not half bad.

He had been orphaned in the war and had no special prospects. Or anybody to worry about either. If he suddenly had the wherewithal to invest in a modest establishment of his own out in one of the new towns that had sprouted up all over England since the war, why not. He'd had enough of London. He was ready to settle down somewhere with his own business. It would be a good life.

So here he was on the North Sea night ferry with a butcher knife in his pocket. And there, across the room, was Rosalind's husband with only a few hours to live.

Just before twelve the lights overhead flickered off and on to signal the closing of the bar. Bagley watched as Farley Denham gulped down the dregs in his glass and rose to leave, then Bagley followed at a discreet distance while the older man descended the stairs to the No Smoking section on the deck below. There were still half a dozen empty seats scattered around the wide low-ceilinged room and Bagley slipped into one close to the back by the passageway. Denham, farther down front, was clearly visible.

At midnight the lights on the stairs and in the passageways dimmed, and in the wide cabin lounges where the second-class passengers settled down to sleep the overhead lamps were turned off completely. The light from the open doorways was sufficient to

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guide anyone who needed to move down the aisle between the seats to the lavatories located amidships. There was also plenty of light, Bert made sure, to observe Denham if he left his seat.

At home, Rosalind had reported, her husband usually made his stumbling nightly visit to the bathroom around four a.m. On the trip over from Harwich he had been right on schedule. But tonight Bert would be ready for him no matter when the call of nature came. Leaning back into the shadows, he settled himself to wait.

Two nights earlier Bagley had dozed off during his vigil, but he had no fear of dozing off tonight. His whole body was tense with the strain of waiting. Too tense. When an hour had passed, the thought crossed his mind that a cigarette might relax him a bit, but an excursion to the smoking cabin seemed too risky.

The room was now quiet of everything but the far-away hum of the big ferry's engines, punctuated by a few intermittent snores. Traffic up the aisle was almost nil. If there were any cranky babies aboard, they were on one of the other decks. No, it would be best to stay right where he was until he had a better reason to stretch his legs than the need for a cigarette.

His mind drifted again to Rosalind. Was she asleep now, serene in the scent of the Shalimar she wore even in bed? Or was she as fidgety as he was, tossing wide-awake, imagining what would soon be taking place? Bert turned in his seat and crossed his legs to the opposite side. Most likely she'd be asleep.

He had been the one who was doubtful about the chances of bringing this whole thing off. She had been the one who sold him on how easy it would be. "There are hundreds of people on those ferries. The police can't arrest everybody, just for being there. There won't be a thing to connect you with him. Nothing in the world."

Yes. Rosalind, most likely, was fast asleep.

Actually, when the time came, Rosalind was right about its being easy. When Denham came blinking up the aisle shortly after four, no one stirred. When Bagley rose to follow him, there was no one awake to see.

Bagley had the advantage in weight and general physical condition. The only exercise Farley Denham practiced regularly, Bert thought, was holding on tight to his money.

There was one more advantage in Bagley's favor—surprise. Denham was washing his hands at one of the long line of basins when the younger man came toward him. He didn't even look up.

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When Bagley's right arm swung up and around for the chop across the back of the neck, Denham staggered forward to crash against the basin, his arms splashing in the water almost up to the elbows.

Pulling himself up, Denham made a half turn in Bagley's direction, but another head blow from the younger man's fist threw him hard against the basin edge a second time. He leaned there dizzily, long enough for Bagley to deliver one more punch, then seemed almost to melt to the floor.

To Bert it seemed during the next minute or two as if everything was happening in slow motion.

The knife was already free of its protective handkerchief wrapping. Turning the stunned Denham over on his back, Bagley stooped down and expertly guided the blade in one deep firm cut across the throat. That was all that was necessary. It was quite final.

Running the water in a basin, Bagley washed the knife clean of blood. He peered down at his shoes for any telltale smears and saw nothing; the dampness he felt in his right sock and trouser leg was obviously the result only of the splashing from the basin—nothing that would give him away.

As a final precaution he examined himself in the mirror for any unnoticed spots on his coat, but the only visible clue to what had just taken place was the unnaturally bright shine of excitement in his eyes. After one last look down at the body on the floor Bagley slipped the knife into his pocket and stepped out through the door. The corridor was as empty as when he had entered.

The next step—tossing the knife over the side—would be child's play. He had figured on tossing his raincoat over too, if there had been any signs of blood on it. But now that wouldn't be necessary. At this point the knife was the only thing in the world linking him to the dead man on the lavatory floor.

As things turned out, he had one bad moment on deck when he heard a low murmuring of voices in the lea of a lifeboat. His eyes, once they were accustomed to the darkness, picked out a couple deep in embrace. He managed to stifle the coming sneeze in time, softly reversed his steps, and walked to the other end of the deck. When he hurled the knife over the guardrail, the dark waters below were so choppy there wasn't even the sound of a splash. When he slipped back into his seat among the sleepers, no one stirred.

The next thing Bagley knew it was morning and the cabin was

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buzzing with nervous activity. He had no inkling of when the dead man in the lavatory had been discovered, or by whom, but everybody now seemed to know of it.

"Man got himself knifed here last night," said the old Scotsman in the seat next to him. "Police coming aboard to question everybody. Searching through all the baggage, too. If you want to use the Men's Room, you'll have to go upstairs."

Bagley went upstairs, his ears alert to all the comments of the people milling in the passageway. Ironically there was not much talk of the murder. Most of the animated conversations consisted of complaints over the enforced delay in disembarking.

For some reason this discovery relaxed him and when at last it was his turn to be questioned he was completely at ease.

Yes, he had gone to sleep right here about midnight. No, he had neither seen nor heard anything unusual. Yes, he had gone to the Men's Room, but only on one of the other decks. No, he wasn't carrying any more baggage than this small airline bag with his pajamas and shaving things inside. Sure, go ahead and search. He had nothing to hide.

It came as something of a shock when, after the search, the policeman led him to the door of the purser's office on the deck above and asked him to wait. When he was taken through the door and introduced to a detective from Scotland Yard, Bagley drew a blank as to what the reason could be.

The detective, sitting at a desk, looked him square in the eye. "I guess you know, Mr. Bagley, why we asked you to come in here for a little talk."

Bert barely managed to shake his head before he exploded with a series of sneezes. "No," he said truthfully, after he had apologized and blown his nose. He nodded in the direction of the policeman who had questioned him. "I told the gentleman outside I didn't see anything."

The detective stared at him a moment before speaking.

"Your passport indicates you're a butcher by trade, Mr. Bagley. That means you're a pretty good man with a knife. Are you quite sure you didn't try out your carving skill last night on one of your fellow passengers?"

Again Bagley shook his head. "I didn't even know about the murder until I woke up this morning. I don't think I ever even saw the man."

"We think you not only saw the man, but followed him to the

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lavatory and killed him," said the detective, leaning forward. "And we have a damned persuasive reason for thinking that!"

Bert put a paper tissue to his nose and blew. "You can't possibly have anything to connect me with that chap who was killed," he insisted, hoping his voice demonstrated an assurance he no longer felt.

The detective examined him with an expression of sympathy.

"You've got yourself quite a cold there, Mr. Bagley. Nose all stopped up, I guess."

Bert nodded and blew again.

"That probably explains it. You see, Mr. Bagley, the murdered man, like many other economy-minded husbands aboard this ship, bought a present last night for his wife at the duty-free shop. He had that present in his jacket pocket when he was attacked and it got smashed when he fell. That's how we know you're the man we're looking for."

The detective pulled open the desk drawer and lifted out a small perfume bottle with a broken neck. "With your nose so stuffed up I guess you wouldn't know it, but you're the only passenger aboard this ship smelling of Shalimar."

The silence in the small room seemed as thick as a fog on the Thames and Bagley experienced a reaction exactly opposite to that of the legendary drowning man. Instead of seeing the past flash before his eyes in an instant, he visualized the future.

He could see a uniformed bobby pushing open the glass door to the meat market on Marylebone High Street and holding up a photograph of Rosalind for Mr. Gropper's inspection. The policeman and the shopkeeper then scrutinizing the rack where Bagley kept his knives and Mr. Gropper nodding yes, one of them *did* seem to be missing . . .

Bagley could see it all, and he knew that nothing he could say now would change the picture in the least. Nothing he could say now or ever.

So, slumping resignedly against the back of the chair, he simply did what he had to do. He sneezed.

"Q"

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"She heard a filmy crinkling sound across the table . . ."

A GOOD CIGAR IS A SMOKE

by RICHARD LAYMON

Just before 10:00 p.m. the stench came. Beth shut her eyes and breathed deeply through her mouth, but it wouldn't go away.

Bourbon always helped, so she got dizzily to her feet, turned off the television, and went into the kitchen.

She took a half-empty bottle from the top of the refrigerator. Her glass, resting upside-down over the bottle's neck, clinked quietly as she returned to the living room. She sat on the couch and put up her feet.

Then, holding the bottle beneath her nose, she twisted off its cap. The bourbon fumes mixed with the terrible odor, masking it.

"Damned cigars," she muttered into the silence.

Randy had never smoked before their marriage. The smoking started seven months later, on a mild June evening. The Eden Street apartment was windy with blowing fans. Randy came in and tossed his necktie over the back of a chair. His upper lip was moist with sweat when he kissed her.

"How were things at the office?" she asked.

"Hey, we got the Harrison account!"

"Wonderful."

"Quite a coup."

"That's just wonderful."

"And Jim Blake had twins. A boy and a girl." Smiling and roguishly wriggling his eyebrows, Randy withdrew a pair of cigars from the breast pocket of his shirt. Each cigar was long, as slender as a finger, and brown beneath its cellophane wrapper.

"Twins, huh?" Beth sat on his lap and put an arm around his shoulders. "We've got a lot of catching up to do."

"We'd better get started."

Beth kissed him and whispered, "Dinner first, before it wilts."

They ate Crab Louis by candlelight. Afterward, as Beth sipped her coffee, she heard a filmy crinkling sound across the table. She

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looked up. Randy was unwrapping one of the cigars.

"You wouldn't," she said, half joking.

"Join me?"

"Are you kidding? I wouldn't *touch* one of those vile . . ." She went silent and her smile withered as Randy's shadowy, distorted face loomed above one of the candles. The flame wavered toward the tip of his cigar. "Please, Randy, don't. I can't stand the smell of those things."

The face above the candles, gnarled with moving shadows, grinned. Its lips blew smoke toward her. "Doesn't smell so bad, does it?"

"It smells awful."

The cuckoo clock began to strike ten, startling Beth from her thoughts. She watched the plastic bird bow down to "ku-ku" each of the hours. Then she waited for the tiny Balkan villagers to start their cheerful dance below the clockface. They didn't move. She suddenly remembered. They hadn't danced since the old apartment on Eden Street.

Such a shame. She and Randy had bought the clock in Solvang on their honeymoon—the cuckoo clock and the kerosene lamp they always kept on the bedroom dresser to light when they wanted the room rosy with a romantic glow.

She gripped her glass tightly as the terrible smell seemed to grow stronger. A wave of nausea passed over her. She gulped down the bourbon, then refilled her glass.

Somehow, she had withstood the stink of Randy's first cigar. "Thank God you're done with *that*!"

"Hey, these things are really great. Quite a revelation. If I'd known how good they were, I'd have—"

"You can't mean it."

"*Quite* a revelation. Now I know what Kipling was talking about. 'A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke.' That guy really knew his stuff."

"Thanks a bunch."

Grinning, he opened the cellophane wrapper of the second cigar.

"Randy, don't."

"It's all right." He lighted it.

"Please, put it out."

"Why?"

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"Please? Because I ask you to. The smell makes me sick."

"You'll get used to it."

"Will I? Oh, will I? Think so?" She stood up with such force that her chair skidded backwards and crashed to the floor.

"Elizabeth!"

She slammed the front door behind her.

On the balcony she gazed through tears at the swimming pool in the courtyard a story below.

Then Randy was behind her, his hand warm on the back of her neck. "Hey, honey, it's no big deal."

"No?" She faced him. The cigar was tilting sideways from his mouth. She snatched it away and threw it from the balcony. The glowing tip traced a path downward to the pool.

"*Loo*-kout!" yelled a voice from below. "What's going on?" Cleo, a downstairs tenant, grinned up at them. She had a bag of groceries in her arms. "Trying to burn my supper?" Her husky laugh floated up to them.

"Sorry," Randy called. Then he clutched Beth's collar, jerked her into the apartment, and kicked the door shut. "That was quite a display," he said. His open hand slapped her cheek. "Don't you *ever*"—another slap—"do *that*"—another slap—"again."

That night, in bed, he held her gently and said, "I'm sorry, honey. I shouldn't have hit you. But you shouldn't have taken my cigar. You had no right to do that." When she began to cry, he cradled her head against the side of his neck and whispered, "It's all right, honey. Everything's all right."

"Think so?"

"Sure. Hey, what say we give the Blakes a run for their money?"

"Why not?" Beth said.

To her it was a mourning rite for what was lost.

The awful smell grew stronger. Beth lifted her glass. She stared at the comforter covering the high slope of her belly, then put the glass down without drinking.

Poor kid. He would have enough strikes against him. He didn't need bourbon in his veins before he could even see the light of day.

"Where's dinner?" Randy demanded three weeks and three dozen cigars after the first one.

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"In the freezer, I guess."

"What?" He set down his briefcase and stared at her.

"I fixed myself a lamb chop."

"That'll be fine."

"You can fix it."

"Hey, what *is* this?"

"Around here we eat by seven. It is now nine."

"So?"

"So I don't know where you've been—and I don't think I want to know—but you weren't here where you belonged. Here with me. It's part of the bargain. If you can't keep your part, you can damn well fix your own supper."

"That's quite enough. Now, please get me a couple of lamb chops out of the freezer and—"

The front door slammed off his sentence.

Beth went downstairs to Cleo's apartment. Cleo's door stood open. "Don't be bashful, sweetheart."

Cleo was reclining on a couch, her carrot-colored hair disarrayed. Beth wondered, briefly, if the bright kimono was real silk.

"You look like a woman with Randy trouble," Cleo said, and twisted a cigarette into the tip of a long holder.

"That's me." Beth had to smile.

"Well, sit yourself down, sweetheart, I'm all ears."

"I just don't know what to do," Beth began.

Cleo listened, often nodding agreement, sometimes shaking her head in sympathy, three times lighting new cigarettes.

"Maybe I should ask him for a divorce."

"Mistake, sweetheart. Don't ask. File first, then tell him. Take it from an old hand who's been there and back, don't ask. That is, if a divorce is really what you're after."

"It's *not*! I want Randy back the old way, the way he used to be. That's what I want. But I guess we can't ever go back . . ." She trailed off, thinking about how good it used to be.

"Might as well bail out then, sweetie. You know what they say about sinking ships? Rats leave first? Let me tell you, it's not just the rats. It's the survivors too."

"But I—" Beth began to cry.

"Aw, now don't—" The ringing telephone interrupted. Cleo said, "Damn," and got to her feet.

Beth needed a tissue.

"Hi back, big fella," she heard Cleo say.

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Heading toward the bathroom, Beth passed the bedroom doorway. She glanced inside. On a lamp table beside the bed was a tissue dispenser of pink plastic. She went to it and plucked out a tissue. She wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

Then she noticed the smell.

A faint lingering smell—bitter and disgusting.

From the wastebasket. She reached inside, pushed aside wadded tissues, plastic wrappers, and found the butt of a dead cigar.

She picked it up. It was soggy and cold where his mouth had been.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." Cleo stood in the doorway, shaking her head sadly. "I could tell you it isn't Randy's, but—"

Beth shoved past Cleo, ran outside, and hurried upstairs to her own apartment. Randy's voice came from the bedroom. He hung up the extension when he saw her.

"So you know," he said, gray smoke pouring from his mouth. He was lying on the bed, the telephone resting on his belly, a freshly lit cigar clenched in his teeth.

She flung the wet cigar butt at him. It thumped against the headboard.

"That's quite enough," he said. "Knock it off."

On the dresser was the lamp, the honeymoon lamp from Solvang, its red chimney dusty from disuse. She grabbed it and threw. The glass shattered above Randy's head, splattering kerosene onto his hair. Into his eyes and his open startled mouth. Onto his shoulders and chest. Onto his cigar.

It made a quiet *whuh*!

Beth's shaking hand lifted the glass to her lips. She held it there, wanting to drink away the odor that clung inside her nostrils. But that wouldn't be fair to little Randy. The poor kid would have enough strikes against him: no father, a murdering mother—manslaughter, they'd called it.

The smell of the bourbon helped, but not enough.

Leaning forward, she took a cigar from the box on the lamp table. She tore off the cellophane and wadded it into a ball. The crinkling cellophane sounded like fire.

She struck a match. Soon the cigar was smoldering. Beth gratefully breathed in the smoke.

Not such an awful smell, really. So much better than the other, the stench of burning flesh.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

REVOLTING: Professor James Moriarty, the worst man of his time, has now appeared in two highly successful books by John Gardner: *The Return of Moriarty* (Putnam, $8.95) and *The Revenge of Moriarty* (Putnam, $8.95). More wickedness is afoot. Gardner has begun work on a third volume about the evil professor in which he becomes involved with Lenin and other Communists of Edwardian times. Together they plot world chaos in a book tentatively called *The Revolt of Moriarty.* Gardner, whose fame mushroomed from the Boysie Oakes series (Rod Taylor played him in *The Liquidator),* has written his absolute final novel in that spy spoof series.

SMOOTH SAILING: The adventures of Nick Velvet are traveling to every part of the world. Edward D. Hoch's super-thief, who steals impossible objects of no value for enormous fees, is the subject of a new French television series. And a collection of Velvet stories has been translated for publication in Japan.

WHALE OF AN IDEA: Robert L. Fish has several popular series characters (Schlock Homes, Kek Huuygens, Jose Da Silva) and the demand for more stories from his typewriter is greater than the supply. His publishers have devised a new method to induce Fish to get creative inspiration. Standard contracts between authors and publishers call for an advance payment against future royalties, which is given to the writer when he signs a contract for a new book. Fish no longer gets standard contracts. Now, when he agrees to write a new book, he gets a trifling amount. The remainder of the advance is turned over to him when he actually begins work on the book!

TIED UP: Frederick Knott is busy these days. The author of *Dial M for Murder* and *Wait Until Dark* is at work on two new plays. He won't say what they are about, except that they are mysteries. That is good news for Broadway, which has never had a surfeit of long-running suspense plays.

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IRREGULAR PERIODICAL: For those who don't think enough books about Sherlock Holmes are available, there are several magazines devoted to the life and work of the Master Detective. The best is *The Baker Street Journal,* under the editorship of Dr. Julian Wolff. Now in its 25th year of publication, it is available from Fordham University Press, University Box L, The Bronx, N.Y. 10458. Subscriptions for the quarterly are $10 per year.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Elfin Truman Capote, whose personal tastes in literary subjects has scarcely eschewed crime, has been persuaded to portray eccentric host Lionel Twain, inviting five world-famous sleuths for a weekend at his crumbling Victorian country manor at New England's Potter's Island to provide solutions for a murder which has yet to happen, in Neil Simon's comedy pastiche, *Murder by Death.* The assemblage is familiar: James Coco is the preening Belgian, Milo Perrier; Peter Falk is San Francisco private eye Sam Diamond, complete with blonde girl Friday (Eileen Brennan); Peter Sellers is the inscrutable Oriental Sidney Wang, arriving with Number 3 son; David Niven is debonair New York investigator Dick Charleston, whose sparkling wife Dora is Maggie Smith; Elsa Lanchester portrays inquisitive British spinster Jessie Marbles, traveling with a wheelchair-ridden old nurse (Estelle Winwood), whom she tends. Lurking belowstairs are an ancient family retainer—Sir Alec Guinness—and Nancy Walker as the village deaf-mute recruited as cook. Zounds!

Although he is best known as Broadway's master playwright this is Simon's eleventh movie and first mystery. "I have always wanted to do a mystery," he says, and has long respected the genre. The cast portraying his coven of detectives is "absolutely perfect," but he is guarded about revealing the plot turns We may be due some surprises

Meanwhile, a review of the current Broadway offerings shows that this season the mystery theater still thrives. The confrontation of master detective and Moriarty in the strong revival of William Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes* continues to enchant audiences. *The Wiz* is at its core the story of a confidence man supreme. *Equus* is an intense psychological probe into the reasons why a disturbed youth one dark night of the soul blinds several horses. *The Ritz* returns

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that formerly flourishing staple, the gangster comedy. But crime is at its best in *Chicago,* a musical whose songs and dances are set mainly in Death Row, and whose two spectacularly soulless heroines both stand trial for killing their lovers. We are dismayed not one bit when a player rages: "In this town, murder is *entertainment!*"

Briefly this Fall, a whodunit play called *We Interrupt This Program* experimented with having "armed revolutionaries" arise from the audience and take over the stage, harking back to Fulton Oursler and Lowell Brentano's 1926 melodrama, *The Spider,* which did the same. The show opens with vaudeville turns, but during Master Magician Chatrand's act a shot rings out and a man is killed. Up from the audience step a doctor, plus police, and the *real* play is underway. That sort of mystery play might be fun reviving.

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INTERVIEW: JOHN BALL

John Ball's first short story about Virgil Tibbs appears in this issue of *EQMM.* He has written five novels about the most famous black detective in literature, the first being *In the Heat of the Night,* the most recent *The Eyes of Buddha,* due this spring from Little, Brown.

EQMM: *In the Heat of the Night* is one of the most significant mystery novels of the past decade. How did it come to be written?

BALL: The idea came from a party in my home. We had a number of guests of varying backgrounds, including the Rev. and Mrs. Settle. For those who can remember the days of the Columbia Network's program, "The Wings Over Jordan" (it ran for 12 years)—the celebrated choir that sang Negro spirituals—Rev. Settle was the founder and originator of 30-second dissertations. He told a story about a traffic accident in the South where two cars had collided. There was a Negro on the corner who saw the accident. A block away a young white man was working on his car. He heard the crash and came to see what happened. This ended in court, and when they put the Negro on the stand as a witness, one of the attorneys said, "Your Honor, I hereby move this man be dismissed on the grounds that he is a Nig-gro (pronouncing it with two g's) and this man is not qualified to give testimony." The judge rapped his gavel and said, "Objection upheld. Now come on, Harvey, you tell us what happened." And the moment Rev. Settle, who of course was black, told that story, I had it right there—the whole thing! All I had to do was put it in the

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typewriter.

EQMM: Is Virgil Tibbs based on a real-life character?

BALL: I patterned him after a good friend of mine who is a Negro. Quiet, doesn't let his abilities show, totally brilliant man. I must confess that, when I was taking piano lessons in Harlem, my teacher's name was Leroy Tibbs.

EQMM: Is this Tibbs prototype a policeman?

BALL: He's in Air Force Intelligence. Beyond that, I feel I shouldn't say any more.

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Whether or not symbolizing future luck, the new year continues to provide first-rate new books at the satisfactory rate of four a month. This time, beginning with one fair-play detective novel of classic pattern, we continue through two hypnotic sagas contrasting intelligent American and British police routine in their war against different but equally repulsive offenses, and end with the real-life biography of a high-flying, Brooklyn-born Italo-American who belongs to the royalty of crime.

Well, let's get at 'em.

Gently Through the Woods, by Alan Hunter (Macmillan, $5.95), poses many questions of human behavior in another ingenious murder mystery for Detective Chief Superintendent Gently, Scotland Yard.

To do some personal filming by himself, Adrian Stoll, wealthy but erratic play-and-film director whose friends are almost all enemies, drives his Volkswagen camper into a patch of woodland near his country house. There he is poisoned by portable-cylinder gas, amid so many wishing his death that they might have stood in line outside the camper.

Maryon Britton, his mistress of many years, is being discarded for a young rival; Edwin Keynes, the cousin who took Maryon from him, will be disinherited if Stoll signs that new will. Youthful Lawrence Turner, talented painter, or old Oscar Walling more than shady financier: every suspect shows fangs of motive.

Despite complexities the author has devised a brilliant double solution to which every clue is honorably given. Superintendent Gently, tough but understanding, encounters one startling factor after another until he traps his quarry in a woodland-pursuit finish as sensational as it is dramatically effective. Mark this one A-plus.

Though the glib term "police procedural" has been applied to Rex Burns's *The Alvarez Journal*

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(Harper & Row, $6.95), you must not imagine that investigation moves in any machinelike way, with lever or cogwheel predominant.

Chicano Detective Gabriel Wager, Denver Police, is almost sure that the Rare Things Import Shop, long suspected of smuggling in marijuana, has become a front for the sale of heroin. But can he prove it? The manager of the shop, facing him with polite enmity, is another clever Chicano, Rafael Alvarez, as slippery and crooked as Wager is human and honest.

Smaller fry clamor round them when Wager, aided by a colleague more concerned about his wife than about his career, sets bait for the big fish. It's a fast, exciting story, firework-illuminated, in which the brains and guile of crookdom at last are overmatched by the brains and guile of the cops.

To nab a psychotic killer who preys on children, and win their case under laws which so often favor the guilty, is the challenge for Britain's C.I.D. throughout *The Evidence You Will Hear,* by Hamilton Jobson (Scribners, $6.95).

In some thriving if unnamed town three girls aged six to nine have already been abducted, sexually attacked, and slain when small Angela Murray fails to return from school. Though Angela's fate remains in doubt, all omens look sinister. Rage and panic blaze together as this sober community faces the reality of their own madman a-prowl.

Our title suggests only the courtroom, but much action unrolls before any jury confronts repellent young Peter Mellish, who still sneers at his captors and thinks himself above the law. This psycho plans escape if they convict him; Angela's father swears vengeance in any case. And yet, despite so many grim threats, there's happiness at the end of as vivid and gripping a novel as you will read this year.

Since author and publisher offer Brian David Boyer's *Prince of Thieves* (Dial Press, $8.95) as mainly factual, apart from changed names, let's accept that assessment.

Vivid from start to finish is this biography of free-spending Peter ("Tony") Milano, described as the world's greatest forger. Usually in disguise, as much actor as forgery artist, he "moved" stolen bonds or securities all over Europe. For Brooklyn Tony it was the sweet life of luxury until somebody betrayed him.

Even after he had served time he couldn't change his life. Read for yourself how he was blackmailed into one last forgery, a fittingly ironic climax for any artist's career.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

NOBODY'S SORRY HE GOT KILLED, by Arthur D. Goldstein. Random House, $6.95

Just because you got involved and solved a couple of murders, that makes you a detective? Max Guttman isn't quite convinced, but once again, Arthur Goldstein's delightful, canny old detective hero, ably assisted by his small band of Irregulars at the Golden Valley Senior Citizens' Center, finds himself right in the middle of a baffling murder case. No one has a good word for the dead man and the long list of suspects Guttman must deal with includes a corporation president whose private life isn't private enough, a non-grieving widow, and a grudge-bearing ex-girlfriend. Arthur Goldstein, author of *A Person Shouldn't Die Like That* and *You're Never Too Old to Die,* lives in New York City.

THE BIG PAYOFF, by Janice Law. Houghton Mifflin Company, $6.95

Anna Peters is one of the women in fiction who doesn't waste time bemoaning her feminine fate. Instead, she makes her way in a man's world with wit and guile. She even resorts to blackmail if that is required to stay on top.

As research assistant to high-powered executive T. William Harrison of New World Oil, Anna gets suspicious when a company contact is killed. Her boss, she soon discovers, is methodically eliminating New World contacts for profit.

The author unfolds her mystery with chilling suspense and violence enriched by Anna's sense of humor and off-beat love affair. Readers will be entranced by this clever, sensitive and enterprising woman.

MORTAL STAKES, by Robert B. Parker. Houghton Mifflin Company, $6.95

"Spenser is just about the best new investigator in town and this time he's hired to see whether Red Sox ballplayer Marty Rabb might be occasionally fixing a game.... Parker tells a fresh, funny, direct and different story—it's as tough as they come and spiked with a touch of real class."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"The author has clearly fallen heir to the Chandler/Hammett mantle.... It's literate, fast-paced, and it has a shock on nearly every page."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Spenser, one hopes, will be around for a long time."—*The New York Times*

POSSESSION, by L. P. Davies, Doubleday, $5.95

When Morton Astley arrives in a quiet English village to pay his respects to his dead brother Eddie, he finds the grave has been desecrated. It is an act of vandalism, or as an official postulates, part of the rites of Macumba—a mixture of voodoo, Catholicism and spiritualism that brings the dead back to occupy the bodies of the living. Looking for an answer, Astley comes upon Albert Crawshaw, a local character—who seems to be sharing the same body, memories and feelings that had belonged to the departed Eddie. Is it Macumba, or is someone or something else responsible?

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DOWN A DARK ALLEY, by Genevieve Holden. Doubleday, $5.95

In Atlanta, Mimosa Way was typical of the South's richly varied social strata. Life in this peaceful setting erupts in violence when a member of a local motorcycle gang —The Desperadoes—turns up in a back alley with his throat slashed. Suspicion points at a very proper and genteel Southern matron who was the last person seen with him. The police are at a loss for further clues until vague signals from her niece's unconscious begin to tell the girl that one of her acquaintances is behaving strangely.

SEE HOW THEY RUN. A Novel of Suspense by William M. Green. Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95

Sewell Crockett heads one of the Washington "agencies" that ferrets out criminals and political enemies. He has files on everybody important. When Crockett suffers a stroke, some files are loose. His right-hand man, Hudson, is there to gather those papers. But with this kind of dynamite, his life isn't worth a damn. Before Hudson *is* killed, he arranges to mail the files to a remote Massachusetts hotel. What he doesn't know is the hotel burned down years ago...

THE CHINESE FIRE DRILL, by Michael Wolfe. Harper & Row, $6.95

Mike Keefe, the hero of Michael Wolfe's THE TWO-STAR PIGEON and MAN ON A STRING, is back on another adventure in postwar Vietnam. This time he is sent to try and rescue the supposedly captive son-in-law of an important U.S. Senator. A dangerous and complicated mission involving many desperate people.

HOLIDAY WITH A VENGEANCE, by Ritchie Perry. Houghton Mifflin Company, $5.95

"*Fall Guy* Philis of the British Intelligence is still *A Hard Man to Kill* even if he's exposed to danger at all times—now in the Bahamas on a small post-coup d'etat island where he becomes involved with salvaging a consul. Then there's his pretty sister, leading the guerrillas and others who are under the iron thumb of dictator Dominique. Once again he'll preempt your attention for as long, or rather as short, as it takes—sufficient unto the evening in any case."—*Kirkus Reviews*

OUTSIDER IN AMSTERDAM, by Janwillem van de Wetering. Houghton Mifflin Company, $6.95

By the author of *The Empty Mirror*.

"Practicing Zen Buddhist/Amsterdam policeman van de Wetering has written a novel combining his knowledge of both disciplines, and it starts off at the head of its procedural class....Originally conceived and exceptionally well-written with lots of cross-cultural exotica."—*Kirkus Reviews*.

A Mystery Guild Selection.

BEYOND CONTROL, by George Leonard. Macmillan, $7.95

"Ten women under the reverse-evolutionary process of acromegaly give birth to monsters. Paul Reardon, a senior lab technician following it through discovers that his chief is involved in genetic manipulation. A real honey."—*Publishers Weekly*

Beyond Control is a story for our time, one with "the immediacy and ominous portent of what could easily happen. A real shocker."

—Frank Slaughter, M.D.

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EQMM BOOK DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT

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OPEN AT YOUR OWN RISK, by Joan Kahn. Houghton Mifflin Company, $12.95

"A beautifully mixed bag of chills or thrills, fiction and fact, for her seventh distinguished anthology. With unerring eye Miss Kahn has sought more obscure material in search of novelty. Many titles will be unfamiliar; even your obedient servant failed to identify a few . . .

"There's crime or diabolism to suit every taste. Dip in anywhere, but expect only the unexpected, which after all is an even more pleasant form of risk."—John Dickson Carr, in *EQMM*

WHY SOMEONE HAD TO DIE, by Jan Roffman. Doubleday, $5.95

Georgina Latham's decision to take in a lodger involves her in a nightmarish sequence of events when she discovers the young lady to be armed and totally dedicated to a very secret and deadly mission. Having caught the tenant searching his rooms, Mr. Latham orders his wife to evict her. During Georgina's absence the tenant disappears, and Georgina becomes determined to find the girl. It is a decision that involves her in a frightening sequence of events leading to the astounding truth of the mysterious lodger.

TITLE NO.	AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
58558	Boyer, Brian David	PRINCE OF THIEVES	Dial	$8.95	$6.95
74144	Burns, Rex	THE ALVAREZ JOURNAL	Harper	6.95	5.50
78528	Davies, L. P.	POSSESSION	Doubleday	5.95	4.75
58407	ed. Ellery Queen	MASTERS OF MYSTERY	Dial	8.95	6.95
54544	Gardner, John	THE REVENGE OF MORIARTY	Putnam's	8.95	6.95
78815	Goldstein, Arthur D.	NOBODY'S SORRY HE GOT KILLED	Random House	6.95	5.50
73352	Green, William M.	SEE HOW THEY RUN	Bobbs-Merrill	7.95	6.35
78832	Holden, Genevieve	DOWN A DARK ALLEY	Doubleday	5.95	4.75
57930	Hunter, Alan	GENTLY THROUGH THE WOODS	Macmillan	5.95	4.75
75894	ed. Joan Kahn	OPEN AT YOUR OWN RISK	Houghton Mifflin	12.95	10.35
56371	Jobson, Hamilton	THE EVIDENCE YOU WILL HEAR	Scribners	6.95	5.50
56041	Law, Janice	THE BIG PAYOFF	Houghton Mifflin	6.95	5.50
57957	Leonard, George	BEYOND CONTROL	Macmillan	7.95	6.35
76076	Parker, Robert B.	MORTAL STAKES	Houghton Mifflin	6.95	5.50
75764	Perry, Ritchie	HOLIDAY WITH A VENGEANCE	Houghton Mifflin	5.95	4.75
78835	Roffman, Jan	WHY SOMEONE HAD TO DIE	Doubleday	5.95	4.75
57030	van de Wetering, Janwillen	OUTSIDER IN AMSTERDAM	Houghton Mifflin	6.95	5.50
71442	ed. Jane West	SHERLOCK HOLMES SCRAP BOOK	Crown	10.00	4.98
73402	Wolfe, Michael	THE CHINESE FIRE DRILL	Harper	6.95	5.50

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a NEW "special" by

JACOB HAY

The first case (and possibly the last, though we hope not) in the hitherto unreported criminal inquiries of the firm of Wracke & Rhuewin, Private Investigators. (Will certain eminent groups of devotees chuckle with glee or gnash their teeth in rage? We're betting on the former.)

A STORY FOR WHICH THE WORLD IS NOW PREPARED

by JACOB HAY

"There is not a thing in the world a gentleman of any innate decency and family can do about the name he was born with," Alastair Wracke declared firmly, taking another sip of his customary postprandial brandy. "I am, of course, quite aware of the legal possibilities, but I would as soon desecrate the grave of my father than change my name to something like, say, 'Pleasants,' or infinitely worse, 'Smythe.' After all, the Wrackes crossed the Channel with William thé Bastard, a fact in which I take a certain modest pride."

"And there were Rhuewins waiting for him with Harold on the beach at Hastings," I felt obliged to reply from my own armchair, facing Wracke's across the hearth of our small but comfortable flat in St. Vincent Square. "We Saxons have our pride too."

The two of us were engaged in one of our periodic and invariably inconclusive debates on the question of changing the legend on the small brass plaque by the front entrance of our building, which read simply, *Wracke & Rhuewin, Private Investigators,* to something slightly less disheartening, like *Central London Confidential Investigations.* Inevitably, family pride prevailed.

"Besides," continued Wracke easily, selecting one of his favourite Burmese cheroots from the humidor atop the small table beside his chair, " 'what's in a name?', as Shakespeare asked. Plus

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which, we neither need nor want more clients. We have one and, considering the princely fees he's happy to pay us for our work, he provides us with more than enough to keep us both quite comfortably, as I think you'll agree."

"And *he*, of course, gets all the credit," said I grimly. "Damme, Wracke, I could only wish that I had that damned quack's writing abilities."

"But you wouldn't be the same old Rhuewin, my dear chap. Literary success might even spoil your basically modest personality. And I'm afraid I'm sadly lacking in that most important requisite which I believe the editors describe as 'colour.' No happy eccentricities or idiosyncrasies, alas."

"What really maddens me," I argued stubbornly, "is that when we do crack one of his really difficult cases and hand him the solution on a silver salver, that wretched doctor—and I use the title loosely, considering the general level of competence of Army medical men—always declares something to the effect that the world is not yet prepared for the story. Why, confound it, man, when he gives any credit whatsoever to outside help, it's always to that bunch of urchins they keep hanging around Baker Street. What's it to him that you and I damned nearly lost our lives in that jungle hellhole of Sumatra before we captured and brought out that giant rat, alive and whole?"

"Nonetheless, you must concede that the discovery that Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer, was rather closely related to the royal family could have done the institution of the monarchy nothing but harm," Wracke replied. "Nor would their Lordships of the Admiralty have appreciated the disclosure that the Dutch steamship *Friesland* was actually sunk, quite accidentally of course, by one of the Admiralty's own experimental torpedoes. That might have put an intolerable strain upon our diplomatic relationships with the Royal Netherlands Government.

"And do bear in mind, Rhuewin, that our combined fees for those two relatively simple accomplishments allowed us the luxury of a villa in the south of France for a whole year, giving us ample time to unravel the circumstances surrounding the Grice Patersons' singular adventures in the island of Uffa. Come now, old fellow, enjoy your brandy and let us relish, rather than regret, our pleasant obscurity."

In saying that he lacked colour, Major (although he declined to use the title) Alastair Wracke had spoken something less than the

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truth. A decade earlier he had been what amounted to Chief of Intelligence for Her Britannic Majesty's Indian Army, with me as his deputy; and such was the superb quality of his work that the inevitable jest to the effect that "the whole bloody army has been left to rack and ruin" swiftly vanished from officers' messes the length and breadth of India.

Then he had the bad luck to predict with stunning accuracy the attack upon and utter destruction of the hill station of Lashnamurnah, together with the massacre of all its inhabitants, a great many of whom included the wives and children of Indian Army and government officials escaping from the awesome heat of the cities of the plains.

Wracke's problem lay in the mentality, or total lack of it, of General the Earl of Passclamore, who had arrived by the inexorable processes of military seniority at the edge of senility and the post of Chief of the Indian Army General Staff almost simultaneously. He had simply refused to accept Wracke's estimate of the impetuous young Rajah of Lashnamurnah.

"Damme, Major, the lad's been to Sandhurst!" the Earl thundered after reading Wracke's carefully documented report. "Plays a damned fine game of polo too."

"Perhaps you forget, sir, that the Rajah was also involved in a very serious cheating scandal and, but for the Colonial Office, would have been dismissed. He was allowed to resign his commission and the incident was kept discreetly quiet. But his pride was badly damaged, and Indian Rajahs are notorious for their long memories. I urgently recommend, with due respect, sir, that Lashnamurnah be evacuated with all possible haste."

"Pish," said General the Earl of Passclamore, "and tosh."

After which came Lashnamurnah, and the grisly affair was somehow passed off to the Indian and British press as a minor incident involving a frontier village. But it was all too well known within the Army. Wracke's damning report was quietly destroyed, and official policy had it that the Chief of Staff had been badly served by his intelligence people. Major Wracke and his deputy, Captain Rhuewin, were tactfully shipped back to England, sworn to secrecy, and prematurely retired on half pay. Wracke was philosophical where I was bitter.

"I can't see either of us taking up jobs in the City," he'd declared upon our arrival at Liverpool. "Intelligence is the only work we know. Why not carry on the same job in Civvy Street?

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We're both bachelors, with no families to speak of, so we could save a bit of money by chipping in together on a flat. I doubt we'll need an office."

"It seems a shoddy sort of business," I'd objected, but there was sound logic in Wracke's reasoning, and I'd no wish to vegetate on my pittance in some remote village.

It was very slim going for that first year after our return, and then we struck gold. Wracke had come back to the flat after a dull day's work on an uninspired embezzlement, and I'd expected him to be in fairly bleak spirits. Instead, he looked positively cheerful.

"Damnedest, most unexpected coincidence in years," he'd exclaimed, pouring us a whisky. "Bumped straight into a chap I'd served with dog's years ago—medical type, retired now with some sort of injury. Naturally, we had to have a drink together, and it turns out that he's sharing digs with an odd character who's pretty much in our own line of work." And here Wracke chuckled ruefully. "Trouble is, he's got too much of it to handle and could use a couple of helping hands to do the preliminary spadework. I took the liberty of telling him that Wracke and Rhuewin had an odd hour to spare from time to time—"

"Ha!" I snorted. "You should have said 'an odd month'."

"No point in selling ourselves short. I should add, by the way, that the entire arrangement is to be absolutely confidential. No contact other than by letters."

"I suppose he did give you an address," said I sarcastically. "Or do we simply address 'To Whom It May Concern'?"

"Hardly. He gave me his card. Let's see, yes, here it is. Dr. John Watson, 221B Baker Street. That's it."

Which is how it all began.

Not 24 hours had passed before there appeared at our door a small, extremely shabbily dressed boy, bearing an envelope addressed simply to A. Wracke, Esq. I gave the lad sixpence and bade him be on his way, and to advise the letter's sender that a reply would be quickly forthcoming.

"Well, Rhuewin, it appears that we have been asked to take spades in hand," said Wracke after he had finished reading the brief note. "It seems that we are to proceed with all possible haste to a place called Grimpen, in Devon, and once there, learn anything we can about a family named Baskerville, and that our first and best source of information would be a physician named James

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Mortimer. Sounds simple enough, and I assume we should have no difficulties in locating Grimpen in so desolate an area as Dartmoor."

The solution to that now-famous case rested largely upon the contents of the concise report that Wracke prepared upon our return from a wet and thoroughly wretched week in what I always think of as the dreariest part of England. Why any sane person should choose to live there has always escaped me.

And so it had gone on for some five years. The tasks assigned to us were always challenging but, in the end, there was the nagging frustration of our anonymity. Yet I must concede that it was this very anonymity that was perhaps our prime asset. 221B Baker Street and its occupants had become famed throughout the civilised world, and certainly known to every experienced member of Great Britain's underworld, whereas Wracke and I could appear as a couple of navvies or respectable stockbrokers, as the situation might demand, without arousing the least suspicion. Nonetheless, for all our contributions, we remained, as Wracke had first put it, merely spadeworkers.

One worry in particular fretted my mind throughout this period. We had allowed ourselves, in my view, to become entirely too dependent upon one client, to whom anything might happen at any time, for there was never any question that he was prepared to place himself in some powerfully dangerous positions when it seemed necessary. Further, from all accounts, our client was a moody and unpredictable sort of chap who might, for reasons known only to himself, abruptly decide to dispense with our services. And then what could we expect?

Not even Scotland Yard was aware of the part Alastair Wracke and I had played in the man's seemingly endless series of successes. Indeed, we ourselves had no proof whatsoever of our peculiar connection with him, since, according to the terms of our original agreement, we had meticulously destroyed every bit of correspondence emanating from 221B Baker Street—our flat was as likely as the next to be burgled, and absolute secrecy had to be preserved. In like fashion and for the same reason, our own reports, always addressed to Dr. Watson, were burned once their contents had been absorbed.

Wracke himself appeared curiously undisturbed by what I regarded as an essentially precarious situation.

"You distress yourself unduly, my dear Rhuewin," he kept reas-

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suring me. "Pray bear in mind we are, in a manner of speaking, students at the Master's knee. With every case we learn a bit more about his methods—"

"Not to mention his so-called 'science of deduction,' " I was wont to interrupt rudely.

Inevitably, the fatal day arrived, just as I had foreseen.

The business began at the worst possible time, while Wracke was off fishing in Scotland. Here I should interject the note that, by mutual agreement, and because we were so much in each other's company normally, we took our holidays separately. While Wracke contented to freeze his bones in some Scots salmon river, I usually chose the climate and charms of Spain or Portugal, far more interesting and far less expensive than the traditional British retreats on the Riviera.

The newspapers were barely off the presses when a uniformed messenger boy brought me the note from 221B Baker Street, the stationery elegant but unmarked, as always, and bearing, again as always, only the initials, *J.W.*

"Proceed immediately with preliminary investigation of theft of the MacMornay Treasure. Earliest report imperative," the note read, its tone as crisp as ever.

I had only glanced at the morning's paper, noting the MacMornay story in passing, and then gone on, as was my custom, to read the leaders. Now I read the story in earnest. Not surprisingly, it was hastily written and lacking in a great many details.

The wonder of it was that the MacMornay Treasure had survived intact for so long. Legendarily one of the richest in Great Britain, it was the property of the Dukes of MacMornay, a notoriously eccentric lot, to say the very least. By ancient tradition (and in defiance of all logic in these modern times), the Treasure was kept not in a proper London bank vault, but in Castle MacMornay itself, in a kind of medieval strong-room somewhere in the bowels of that hideous old structure.

And astoundingly, it was not insured. The Dukes believed neither in banks nor in insurance companies, according to the press account. The present Duke, to further complicate the matter, had apparently died of a heart attack upon learning of the loss of his family's fortune, alleged to consist largely of priceless jewels.

The story concluded unsatisfactorily with the flat statement that the police had been unable to find a single clue.

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I immediately sent off a telegram to Wracke, suggesting that since Castle MacMornay was in Scotland, I should join him post-haste so that we might begin our assignment, although I was appalled at the prospect—I dislike Scotland almost as much as I do the Devon moors.

Wracke's telegraphed reply, which I received late that same evening, came as a surprise: "See no need for your presence, especially in view your distaste for the Highlands. Certain I can handle this one on my own. You can best serve by relaying my messages to J.W."

So much for my value to the firm, I thought, somewhat bitterly. Yet Wracke was probably correct, and possibly I could be more useful in London. Certainly, I could never hope to pass myself off to some shrewd Scot's eye as an experienced deer-stalker or fisherman, and the appearance of a stranger in Wracke's company would only serve to arouse the suspicion of native Scots.

Two days later I received a letter from Wracke.

"You will understand," he wrote, "my lack of trust in the confidentiality of Scots' telegraphic employees. The situation here is most discouraging in every respect. Police doing their usual bumbling job. Villagers of Mornay more than usually suspicious. Thus far, I have uncovered nothing of the slightest value to our client."

I relayed this information to 221B, and received a rather waspish note in return: "Time of the essence. Unable understand lack of progress. J.W."

Wracke's next communication hinted at a desperation I'd never before seen him display.

"Convinced thief made a clean getaway. Assume all ports are under close watch. If there are no new developments within the next several days, I will return to London. I cannot escape the uneasy feeling that we may have encountered our first failure. W."

I will not burden the reader with the details of my further correspondence with 221B Baker Street, and the increasingly sharper tone of J.W.'s replies. Wracke's final report, written after his dejected return to London, amounted to an outright admission of defeat and produced what I had for so long dreaded, a curt dismissal of our services and a complete termination of our arrangements. Wracke's expenses would, of course, be paid in full.

"Wracke and Rhuewin on the rocks," I attempted a feeble jest

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after that all-too-final communication. Even our postprandial brandy by the hearth tasted like vinegar in my mouth as I spoke the words.

"Not entirely, Rhuewin, not entirely. We still have a tidy sum in our bank accounts; we can afford to vegetate for a little while," was Wracke's calm reply. Then he did a strange thing, raising his glass to me. "Lashnamurnah," he said quietly. It was the first time I'd heard him mention the name since our return from India. "In memoriam."

By now the reader will have observed that I lack the narrator's ability so amply demonstrated by my opposite number at 221B Baker Street. And the truth of the matter is that I never did get a full accounting from Wracke.

In any event, the sad fact remains that the firm of Wracke & Rhuewin, left without its only and most generous client, was something less than a success, and it took us about a year to reach the end of our savings—for we had done ourselves well during those years before the MacMornay Treasure disaster, before we were obliged to face up to the harsh realities. Wracke, as was his manner, did not seem in the least disturbed. He had, apparently, long since dismissed—as had the press—the MacMornay theft from his thoughts.

"What we require, my dear chap," he declared one especially gloomy London morning, "is a change of scene. Even after all these years I've never been able to readjust myself to this wretched climate. But I'm afraid we'd find precious little welcome waiting for us if we returned to India. But a tropical clime's the ticket." He smile cheerfully. "Restore our morale over-night, take my word for it."

I am writing this on the palm-shaded verandah of the comfortable yet unostentatious villa that Wracke and I purchased fronting on a beach near the capital city of a certain South American country. Happily, it has no extradition treaties with His Majety's Government. Otherwise, Wracke and I might all too easily be spending most of the remainder of our lives in Dartmoor, for it was, of course, Wracke who had stolen the MacMornay Treasure.

The affairs of British nobility had never occupied my attentions in the slightest during our stay in London. Indeed, I thought the whole business was a lot of pompous nonsense that received far

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more notice than it deserved. So I'd been quite unaware that General the Earl of Passclamore had (doubtless to the vast relief of the entire Indian Army) succeeded to the Dukedom of MacMornay and had subsequently retired from active service to oversee his vast estate in Scotland.

"God, how I waited for that day when the newspapers reported his return," Wracke told me one evening as we sat outside enjoying the balmy air of the South Atlantic. The harshness of his tone contrasted sharply with the calm seas and glorious sunset.

"You may recall," he continued, his voice softening, "that among the victims of the massacre at Lashnamurnah was a Mrs. Cyril Amberson—"

"Wasn't she the widow of that chap who was murdered in Kabul a few years earlier?"

"The same." And now Wracke's voice grew very quiet. "What I feel quite certain you didn't know then was that Deborah Amberson and I had reached an agreement with a view to matrimony—"

"Good God, Wracke! There was never the slightest hint. I'd no idea!" I was dumfounded, for it seemed impossible that such an affair could have escaped the seemingly omniscient gossips of Calcutta. And Indian Army wives should be the envy of any intelligence service in the world.

"She was the most gentle and lovely of women," Wracke resumed, "just as her husband had been one of the finest officers I'd ever known. Indeed, I hardly felt worthy of attempting to take his place. From the day of her death I swore to avenge myself on that swine, Passclamore, no matter how long it took."

In the waning light Wracke's smile was mirthless. "Then my luck took an incredible turn, beginning with that first encounter with Dr. Watson. I knew for a certainty that should anything ever befall the Duke of MacMornay and his Treasure, Dr. Watson's colleague would most assuredly be called in to 'assist' the police. So it was imperative that I know his methods and techniques. I found them brilliant, but I got the measure of the man. I discovered that he was by no means infallible."

"But surely you could have told me something of all this," I protested. "I despised Passclamore as much as you, although for far less reason. In my own case, he merely wrecked my career, and all I wanted to do was to forget the old fool."

"I told you nothing, old friend, because, in the event that my

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plans went awry, the less you knew, the better. Even had our former friends of 221B Baker Street confronted you, you could have told them nothing."

"But the theft itself? How on earth did you manage it?"

And now Wracke's smile became jovial. "That, my dear Rhuewin, as our former employer was so fond of saying, must remain my secret. But when a master is held in contempt by his servants, certain arrangements become simple. I may add that the late Duke's so-called 'strong-room' was typical of the man's mentality, and presented as much difficulty as a child's penny bank."

And now my companion became serious. "You must, however, believe me when I declare that I had no intention of causing the old fool's death. That shook me badly, I must confess, but, in all honesty, I cannot bring myself to regret it. He died of greed, and I shed no tears for his passing."

All the foregoing should, I trust, explain why there is no mention of the MacMornay Treasure in the various records, or even in the unreported cases, so assiduously compiled by Wracke's old friend, Dr. Watson; nor is any account likely to be found if and when that travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box in the Charing Cross branch of the bank of Cox and Co. is ever opened.

I debated long and soberly with myself and my conscience before deciding to put all the foregoing down on paper, and not even Wracke is aware of the existence of this manuscript, nor shall he ever be. I have arranged matters with my own bankers that the envelope containing it shall not be opened until the year 1976, by which far-off time all of us concerned herein will have long since passed to whatever rewards await us.

I suppose it is simply a matter of personal pride (or you may see fit to call it conceit), but I feel that the assistance rendered by the firm of Wracke & Rhuewin to the occupants of 221B Baker Street should not go entirely unnoticed by future historians of criminology. My instructions to my banker were to the effect that this brief narrative be placed in the hands of some reputable editor and publisher, with a duplicate copy to the proper authorities at Scotland Yard.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

CHARLENE WEIR

George Potter suffered from insomnia. He had tried every cure his keen mind could think of, including such well-known ones as taking a hot bath and drinking warm milk before retiring. He had never heard of red rum inducing sleep . . .

THE PALINDROME SYNDROME

by CHARLENE WEIR

George Potter sighed at the cruel fate that compelled him to go through life burdened with a nocturnal affliction. Rays from the streetlight, filtering through a gap in the curtain, caught the lampshade and threw a shadow on the ceiling. George stared at the shadow and tried to make it represent something new. But it refused to resemble anything except a black bear. While he watched, the black bear faded slowly into a dirty polar bear, then disappeared altogether as night tipped over into dawn.

He sighed again, a sigh that went unheard because of the jangle of the alarm. Ethel stopped in mid-breath, slapped the clock to silence, yawned, stretched, and jumped out of bed. She wrapped her short plump figure in a fuzzy pink garment. "Good morning, George. It's time to get up." Her blue eyes were clear and bright.

George moaned and rubbed his gritty, bloodshot, brown ones. Once he was up he had great difficulty with things like toothpaste and shoelaces. Later, at his office, he had trouble distinguishing the debits from the credits. In the drug store at noon he was yawning into his vegetable soup when Henry Williamson slid onto the stool next to him.

George didn't care much for Henry. Henry was a round-faced beaming man who still had all his hair even if it was gray. But today George was so demoralized that his troubles came spilling out. George admitted he had a severe problem.

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He suffered from insomnia. All too often he stumbled to bed at 11:30 after fighting to keep awake until the end of the news, only to find that once in bed his heavy eyelids recoiled as though held by a tight spring and released a flurry of night thoughts like pigeons from a coop.

He tried everything from warm milk and hot baths to counting sheep and picturing the word *sleep* on a blackboard, written with each inhalation and erased with each exhalation. He tried taking his age, 55, and counting backward. He even doubled it and counted back from 110. He supposed he could count the gray hairs on his head, but as there were less of them each night that would be more depressing than somniferous.

Months ago he had learned that none of these devices produced the desired effect. Driven by the circumstances, he worked out a careful pattern. Night after night, feeling he was the only person awake in a world of the sleeping, he would get out of bed, don robe and slippers, and shuffle out to the kitchen leaving Ethel, breathing gently, alone in the bed. Ethel slept like the gold-mining stocks he had once bought from a friend.

He fixed himself a pot of hot chocolate and settled in his overstuffed chair in the living room. For exactly one hour he worked crossword puzzles in the stack of magazines on the bottom shelf of the bookcase.

Then George moved on to the jigsaw puzzle and for precisely one hour he fitted pieces together. He studied the shape and color of each particular piece before picking it up. He prided himself on his ability to choose the correct piece before touching it with his fingers. A certain number of pieces fitted in this manner was a good omen. But if he made too many errors, if the pieces he chose didn't slip into the allotted spots, it meant sleep would be more elusive than ever that night.

Leaving the jigsaw puzzle, he moved back to his chair and selected a book from the row of current bestsellers on the second shelf of the bookcase. He read for exactly 30 minutes. Often this was a slow and gentle soporific, bringing on a yawn by the end of the first chapter and drowsiness by the end of the third.

The top shelf of the bookcase held his last and most desperate measure. Here he kept publications of the latest political activities, and he read these for 45 minutes.

He must follow this routine meticulously. If he deviated by so much as one minute, then all was lost. But if he followed his

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schedule exactly, then sometimes—oh, sometimes!—he was rewarded with a few hours of blessed sleep. Indeed sometimes, so deadly dull were the politicians' statements that he stumbled toward the bedroom, removing robe and slippers on the way, and reached the bed just in time to flop comatose across it.

If occasionally he was tricked into staying in bed by thinking that sleep was just a few minutes away, his adversity was compounded. He was then beguiled by the flock of thoughts fluttering around his head and he would pluck one from its fellows and examine it until an hour or two before he had to get up. Too many nights of insufficient sleep were making him old before his time, causing his hands to tremble and dulling his keen mind.

"Is that all that's bothering you?" Henry said, slathering ketchup on French fries and piling onions and pickles on a hamburger. "Don't give it another thought. I know just the thing to solve your problem." He paused to balance a slice of tomato on top of the heap, then said, "Palindromes." He smiled like a man with eight solid hours of sleep behind him.

"Palindromes?"

"Sure. You know, words that read the same backwards or forwards."

"I don't think I understand," George said, already sorry he had confided in Henry.

"My boy, you really are in bad shape, aren't you? Good thing you ran into me today. Your troubles are over, believe me. Palindromes are the answer. Words like *madam*. The same backwards or forwards. Surely, you know the famous one about Napoleon: *Able was I ere I saw Elba*. Spelled the same each way. A-b-l—"

"Yes, but how is that going to help me get to sleep? Am I supposed to say it over and over?"

"Oh, no, no. You don't get the idea at all." Henry washed a mouthful of hamburger down with a gulp of coffee. "You have to make up your own. You start out small with single words like *dog god*. You see? Then you work up to sentences like the *Able Elba* one. Whenever I can't sleep, out come the old words and in fifteen minutes I'm sleeping like a night watchman. Never fails. I've been working on one for weeks. Starts out *Enid Star* and ends up *rats dine*. But I always fall asleep before I get the middle part worked out."

George had no faith in anything Henry might suggest, but that same night when George had gone from the crossword puzzles to

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the politicians and was still awake at 4:30, he felt he had nothing to lose. He got *level* right off. A few minutes later he had *snip pins,* a revolutionary new sewing gadget. He was working on *ten net* when sleep swarmed over him.

The next night with something very near panic he abandoned his carefully worked-out schedule—the crosswords, jigsaws, bestsellers, and politicians that had served him long if not faithfully. With nervous trepidation he hesitantly embraced this new endeavor. He reviewed the previous night's crop, then produced *reel leer* and *devil lived* and *snap pans.* The last one was a special kind of cookware, he thought, floating on clouds of sleep. From then on there was no stopping him.

He was ecstatic. He was getting six or seven hours of sleep where before he only got one or two, sometimes none. It wasn't long before he was doing sentences. *Warts level straw* was his first. After that came *Pat repaid a diaper tap.* He was rather proud of that one. No more single words—grander creations were ahead.

In his delirium of joy there was something George failed to notice. Any addict could have pointed it out to him, but George went along happily building up his palindromic power without realizing that it was taking stronger and stronger doses each time before he drifted off to sleep. The night he finished Henry's *Enid Star* he was back to a mere two hours. But he couldn't wait to tell Henry what he had created. *Enid Star lived ere devil rats dine.*

One morning two months later, after no sleep at all, he sat down at the breakfast table and blurted out to Ethel, *"Mort's war on time did emit no raw storm."* He was too groggy from lack of sleep to catch the error in the first and last words.

Ethel stopped dishing out scrambled eggs to stare at him.

"Well, there's this guy Mort," George said, "who was extremely angry about buying all these products on the time-payment plan, so he—"

"You're sick, George," she said, dumping eggs on his plate. "You better see a doctor."

"*Rot cod*?" George pooh-poohed that idea. He wasn't sick. Far from it. At work his mind seemed to clack away like a well-oiled computer. True, he felt a little tired now and then and his boss was becoming a mite unreasonable about George's nonchalance in the matter of debits and credits; but other than that, George never felt better.

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His excitement with the game became so high that like all fanatics he wished to share the enchantment and bring in converts. He took to waking up Ethel when he had worked out a particularly intricate treasure.

The first time, Ethel responded with *dam mad* and George soared to dizzying heights of happiness. He could see it all now—he and Ethel lying side by side through endless nights of palindromes. She would be the *Anna* to his *Otto*, and *edit* to his *tide*, the *loop* to his *pool*, the *smart* to his *trams*, the—

But alas, this sweet dream did not come to pass, because when he woke her on a subsequent occasion she threw the pillow at him, yelling she had to go to work in the morning. Reluctantly he was forced to the conclusion that her first response represented the state of her mind and that she had not grasped the delights of the game.

But George wasn't discouraged. Periodically he would wake her to share a new find and each time he hoped she would lovingly join him in palindroming through the long dark hours.

Not only was Ethel stupidly uninterested in the palindromes, but he noticed she was beginning to behave oddly. She seemed to get thinner, and there were black smudges under her eyes. Any unexpected noise sent her flying apart like a startled cat. Sometimes she stared blankly into space or just sat and whimpered. She definitely wasn't her usual self.

Perhaps it's her age, George thought. He renewed his efforts to arouse her interest in his game. Almost every night he would wake her to astound her with a new discovery. He would have been willing to do it more often but the time came when she refused to speak to him after being awakened.

One evening, six months after it all began, George felt he was ready. He intended to compose the greatest palindrome of all time. He was so eager to get started that he could hardly wait until the news was over before he rushed off to bed. He plumped his pillow, lay on his back staring at the black bear on the ceiling, and flexed his mental fingers. This was it. He was ready and confident. All his rigorous training had led up to this supreme moment.

While Ethel tossed around making herself comfortable he did a few warmup exercises. *Civic. Sagas. Solos.* By the time he completed these simple scales, Ethel was sleeping.

Midnight. Time to begin. Adrenalin coursed through his body

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and his heart jumped with the thrill of challenge, this greatest of all challenges.

George wiped his sweaty palms on the blanket and took a few deep breaths. With talent such as his there was no need to be nervous. In a very short time he had selected his beginning words. *Pat. Let.*

At one o'clock he could see that he'd have to make notes. His was the caliber of champions. This creation would be much too long to figure out without writing it down. He switched on the lamp and rummaged through the drawer of the bedside table to find pencil and paper.

Ethel opened one bleary blue eye and glared at him. "George, what are you doing?"

"It's okay," he said. "It's coming along fine."

She put the pillow over her head.

George scribbled hastily for moments at a time, then chewed on the end of the pencil while his brain worked at lightning speed. All went well until three o'clock. At three o'clock he was stuck. At 3:30 he was still stuck. He howled in frustration and pounded the bed with his fist.

Ethel reared straight up in bed, looking around in confusion. "What?"

"A little bit of a problem. But don't worry. I'm not going to quit."

Ethel mumbled something that sounded like never-get-any-sleep, but George was too involved in his words to hear clearly. She punched her pillow and turned her back on him.

A half hour later he was still stuck. He placed his hand on the mound next to him and shook it. "Ethel?"

"Mmm?"

"Ethel!"

She sat up and shook her head groggily. "What is it?"

"Ethel, tell me a word that ends in r-e-m."

"What? You woke me up at four o'clock in the morning to ask me for a word that ends in r-e-m? You're crazy, George. That's what you are. Crazy." Her face got dangerously red and she started to vibrate like a rocket about to take off.

George waited tensely, hoping the vibrations meant her mind was working on r-e-m. But after a few moments she flopped back down and flung the blanket up over her quivering cheeks.

At first George was hurt, but then he understood. Of course.

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Ethel was quite right. He must solve the problem by himself. Otherwise it wouldn't count. He had almost ruined his night's work by asking for help. He sighed and rested briefly, letting relief at his narrow escape cool his sweaty brow.

Then he went back to it. It was, indeed, a knotty problem. *Theorem* seemed to be the only word in the English language that ended in r-e-m. And that word was totally useless to him. He strained and suffered in agony while his brain toiled on. Then at last he had it. "*Oh ho,*" he shouted, then repeated it backward, "*Oh ho.*"

The mound under the blankets muttered.

"*Harem*," George told the mound joyfully.

He worked brilliantly and steadily until five o'clock when he began to get drowsy. He got up, not bothering with the robe and slippers, and made a pot of strong black coffee. He put this, along with a cup and saucer, on a tray and carried it back to the bedroom. The empty cup tended to rattle just a little.

As he was placing the tray on the bedside table, Ethel leaped out of bed, ripped off the blankets, and dragged them behind her out of the room.

George stared in puzzlement until she disappeared into the dark of the living room. Then he poured a cup of coffee and went back to his creation.

At 6:30 he finished the pot of coffee and the last word at the same time.

Masterful! He held the paper at arm's length and read it, then clasped it to his chest. Magnificent!

"Ethel," he shouted jubilantly as he ran into the living room. "Ethel, I've done it! I'm finished!"

Ethel wrapped in blankets was lying on the couch. He grabbed her shoulder and jerked it back and forth. "I'm going to read it to you," he said. "But first let me explain that it's a note from this boss to his secretary. The boss is planning a lecture series for small towns and the secretary knows of several local men who want to give lectures. One wants to talk about a nomad. You understand? It starts out *Pat.* That's the name of the secretary. *Pat, Let—*"

"*Red rum*!" Ethel yelled, erupting from the blankets and racing to the kitchen.

George paled. "No, no," he whispered.

"*On, on,*" Ethel replied, returning with a knife. Waving it above

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her head she ran toward him shrieking, "*Bats! Bats! Bats!*" and she plunged the knife into his chest.

"*Enog esoog,*" George gasped as he crumpled to the floor.

Ethel dropped the knife and staggered wearily to the bed.

In the afternoon when she got up she found the paper lying next to the body. It was covered with rusty brown spots, but she was still able to read it.

Pat,

Let one rustic at a time yammer. "A hag, nomad, evil madam lived among a harem" may emit a tacit, sure note.

L. Tap

When she showed it to the psychiatrist he said it was definitely the product of a disturbed mind.

At her trial the judge was very sympathetic. He said that owing to the extreme provocation of the conditions leading up to this tragic event her action was understandable and under the circumstances was "*no evil, Madam. Live on.*"

"Q"

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INTERPOL: The Case of the Flying Graveyard

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The first report of the downed aircraft reached Inspector Geroux as he was finishing his meager breakfast. He disliked being called out so early in the morning, especially for something not strictly his responsibility.

The plane had come down in a heavily wooded area near the Swiss border, sheering off the tops of the trees as it plunged to earth. It was a twin-engined chartered jet bound for London, but that was all the Inspector could establish on the telephone. There was little more to be learned at the scene. He trudged across a plowed field to the edge of the woods, staring at the splintered trees and wounded earth. It was a hell of a way to die.

"No survivors," one of the uniformed officers told him glumly.

"How many aboard?"

"We're checking that now. We've recovered four bodies so far. There may be more."

Geroux grimaced. "Did it explode when it hit?"

The officer shook his head. "There was a fire, but the wings broke off when they hit the trees and the wing tanks didn't go up. The burning plane was a hundred yards away from the wings."

"Not that it helped those poor souls any."

For the next hour the grim task went on. Dr. Billou, the local coroner, arrived and went about his task of tagging the bodies

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Charred and severed limbs were collected separately in plastic body bags. Geroux watched from a distance, pitying one white-faced worker who walked behind a tree to be sick.

"We have a report now," the police officer told him. "It was a charter flight from Rome to London, carrying four businessmen and the pilot."

Presently, as the men were finishing their grisly task, Dr. Billou approached Geroux. "Can we talk out of earshot of the others?" he asked.

"Certainly." Geroux led him away across the newly plowed fields. "What's troubling you?"

"Did you get a good look at any of those bodies?"

"Only from a distance, Doctor. My stomach is not strong."

"I think you'll have to get a bit closer. There's something strange here."

"Strange? In what way?"

Dr. Billou dropped his voice to a whisper, though there was no one near them. "That's a plane-load of dead men!"

"I should think they are dead, after that crash and fire."

"No, no, you don't understand. They were dead *before* the crash! Dead and perhaps buried. There's no blood in their veins—all five bodies are full of embalming fluid!"

At Interpol's headquarters outside Paris it was a normal busy Tuesday. Sebastian Blue had not seen Laura since the weekend, and at the moment his mind was otherwise occupied. The Secretary-General had passed him a sheaf of press clippings from papers as varied as the London *Sunday Times* and Japan's *Asahi Shimbun.*

"Don't worry about the ones you can't read," the Secretary-General told him. "They all say pretty much the same thing. Interpol is helpless against acts of international terrorism, and may have outlived its usefulness."

"I know we've had political and budgetary problems, but—"

"It's more than that, Sebastian. People are calling us old-fashioned, behind the times. Figures show that fully ninety-five percent of police inquiries in Europe are now conducted directly between police forces, rather than passing through our channels. New groups are being established to do the work we once did. Even your own specialty, airline crime, is being preempted by the new International Association of Airport and Seaport Police."

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Sebastian Blue smiled. "Are you saying Interpol no longer needs my services?"

"No, no. I am merely pointing out some of our current image problems. Happily, our new Drug Intelligence Unit has been very well received. Their troubleshooting team has been called on for several foreign assignments. And certainly you and Laura Charme have met with equal success. The concept of team action, available on instant call, may be our hope for the future."

The blinking light on his desk interrupted him, and he pushed the intercom button. Immediately Sebastian heard Laura's familiar voice. "Sorry to intrude, sir, but we need Sebastian Blue."

"What is it?"

"Airline Crimes Unit has an emergency request for aid, from an Inspector Geroux in a town near the Swiss border. It's concerning the crash of a charter jet this morning."

"You'd better see about it, Sebastian," the Secretary-General said.

"Very well, sir."

He found Laura in her office, studying a map of southern France. "This is where it crashed, Sebastian."

"Did he say why he needed us?"

She shook her head. "But his voice on the telephone seemed quite agitated."

"A case of sabotage, I suppose. We'd better fly down for a look. It would be the responsibility of the nation where the flight originated, of course, but we might be able to lend a hand."

He supposed it was partly the Secretary-General's conversation regarding Interpol's fading image that impelled him to make the decision. Certainly there was nothing the French police inspector could tell him that would justify Interpol's involvement.

Or so he thought.

Six hours later, seated in Geroux's little office, he and Laura knew better. "Dead men?" he repeated, not quite understanding.

"A flying graveyard," Geroux said. All five people on that plane were already dead and embalmed when it crashed."

"Then who was flying it?" Laura asked.

"We don't know."

"Have you told the press about this?" Sebastian asked.

"Certainly not. So far only Dr. Billou and I know."

"The next of kin will want the bodies. Have they been notified?"

The Inspector shook his head. "Frankly, Mr. Blue, we're not at

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all certain the bodies in the crash were those of the men who boarded the plane in Rome."

"Be almost simpler if they weren't," Sebastian mused.

"How do you mean?"

"I'd rather believe the plane made an unscheduled stop while the five men left and the bodies were put aboard, than try to imagine a method by which five people could be embalmed while in the air."

"In any event, I thought it a job for Interpol," Geroux said.

"And rightly so, since several countries may be involved. But we must keep the press out of this at all costs. They would surely fill their papers with speculation on flying saucers and the like."

"But if it's not flying saucers," Laura asked, "what does that leave us?"

There was a map of southern Europe on the wall of Geroux's little office, and Sebastian walked over to it. "I suppose we must consider the possibility of insurance fraud. Men have pretended death before to collect their own insurance."

"But *five* of them?"

He pointed to the map. "Look here, the most direct air route from Rome to London passes over the Swiss Alps. In order to have crashed where it did, this plane had to have drifted slightly off course to the west. If it had been on course, it would have gone down in the mountains."

They thought about that for a moment and Laura said, "It would have crashed and exploded on a mountainside. The wing tanks would have gone up. There'd be very little left."

"The bits and pieces of bodies would have ended up in a mass grave on a mountainside," Inspector Geroux agreed. "It's sometimes done when the crash site is too difficult to reach."

"And the fact the bodies were embalmed would never have been discovered!" Laura turned to Sebastian. "That's it—the plane was meant to go down in the Alps! But whoever set the automatic controls before bailing out miscalculated a bit."

"I want you to keep this whole thing under wraps," Sebastian instructed Giroux. "Not a word to the press or anyone else. The people behind this must believe their scheme was successful."

"Where do we start looking?" Laura asked. "In England or in Rome?"

"Both," Sebastian decided. "You're going to London, to talk with the next of kin. I'm going to Rome."

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Laura Charme tried not to speculate on Sebastian's reason for sending her to England while he went south. Perhaps he felt she could more readily deal with the bereaved women. Or perhaps he wanted to avoid another encounter with his former wife and her Scotland Yard husband. It had been the collapse of that marriage which brought Sebastian Blue to Paris and to Interpol. And to Laura.

Now, breathing in the brisk spring air of London, she pushed Sebastian's motives out of her mind as she boarded a train for the brief journey to Greater Ware, a northern suburb that had been the home of the plane's four passengers. It was the morning after the crash, and she wasn't surprised to learn from a telephone call that the four apparent widows had gathered at the home of one of them.

It was a neat little house near the station, with a yard that would surely produce roses by summer. A red-eyed woman of uncertain middle age answered the door. "Mrs. Smothly? My name is Laura Charme—"

"Another reporter?" The door was about to close on her.

"No, no, I'm an investigator for the French government, looking into the cause of the plane crash. I phoned Mrs. Jenkins and was told she and the other wives were over here." She'd purposely avoided mentioning Interpol's name.

"I know nothing about the crash," the woman said. "Only that Gordie's not coming back to me." Her eyes filled as she spoke.

"May I come in?"

"Just for a few minutes." She stepped aside and Laura entered.

The other three women were in the kitchen, drinking some morning coffee. They did not immediately join Laura and Mrs. Smothly in the living room. "I know it must have been a terrible shock," Laura said.

"It was that," the woman agreed, seating herself on a sofa that was just a little threadbare.

"Can you tell me something about the nature of the trip?"

"Gordie and Tom Jenkins and the other two are all employees of Heath House, Limited. They are engineers whose job is the installation of computer systems in foreign countries."

Laura noted her use of the present tense. Either she hadn't yet accepted the fact of their deaths, or she had reason to know they were still alive. "And they were in Rome to do a computer installation for the company?"

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"Yes. With the necessary equipment and such, it's always been easier to fly down on a chartered jet than on a commercial airline. Heath House has an agreement with the charter company for regular service."

"Where in Rome was the installation being made?"

"At a Catholic university there. Odd, you don't think of computers very often in connection with the Eternal City."

"No," Laura agreed. "Tell me, Mrs. Smothly, was your husband covered by life insurance?"

The woman nodded. "All of them were. It was a company policy paying 50,000 pounds each in the event of accidental death while traveling on company business."

"That's a great deal of money."

"Oh, yes, it would be for us. Gordie was never paid all that well, you know. They say computer technologists in the States earn a great deal more. And with this inflation and everything—"

One of the other women came in from the kitchen then, carrying her coffee cup. She was younger than Mrs. Smothly, and better-looking, with straight blonde hair that hung to her shoulders. "Are you from the insurance company?" she asked Laura. "I heard you mention the policy. I'm Mrs. Jenkins. My Tom was on the plane too."

"Not insurance," Laura told her. "I'm investigating the crash for the French government."

"Do they think it might have been sabotage? A bomb or something?"

"I have no way of knowing."

Mrs. Jenkins tossed back her long blonde hair. "If that's the case, you should be checking the other end, in Rome. That's the place where the bomb would have come from, not here."

"Stop all this about bombs!" Mrs. Smothly exclaimed. "Let me get you some coffee, Miss Charme. Or would you prefer tea?"

"Coffee would be fine."

When Mrs. Smothly returned from the kitchen the other two women came with her. Like Mrs. Jenkins they were younger and more attractive than Mrs. Smothly. One introduced herself as Rita Blake, while the other was a sullen dark-haired girl named Younglove. "Alice Younglove." She spoke her name slowly, meeting Laura's eyes as she did so. "Why are you investigating?"

"The government always does in these cases. We try to prevent its happening again."

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Rita Blake seated herself next to Laura. "Will that help bring our husbands back?"

It just might, Laura thought to herself. It damn well might! These women were already beginning to get on her nerves. She wished she was with Sebastian, and she wondered what he was doing at that moment.

Rome, to a professed nonbeliever like Sebastian Blue, had always seemed something of a curiosity. Now in this Holy Year it was a city of pilgrims and tourists, crowded beyond capacity, with special buses running every fifteen minutes between the churches. He could only look and wonder.

The man he first sought out for information about the ill-fated flight was a priest, a boyish-looking American in his thirties who was in charge of purchasing for a large Catholic university. "Certainly," he told Sebastian as they strolled across the tree-shaded campus. "I ordered the computer with the approval of our board of trustees. Heath House had the lowest bid and they won the contract. Most of the hardware was shipped here by freighter, and these four men came down to assemble it and instruct us in its use. They were here about a week in all."

"Did you notice anything unusual during their stay? Any tensions? Any unexplained visitors?" he asked Father Philip.

"Well, of course we didn't keep tabs on their free time. I suppose they toured Rome just like other visitors. I know on Saturday night the four of them went out to a restaurant on the Via Veneto, and later to a somewhat disreputable night club near the Pantheon."

Sebastian made a note of the names. "What about their pilot?"

"I saw nothing of him."

As he was preparing to leave, Sebastian had another thought. He asked the priest, "Where would one go in Rome for some bodies—unclaimed bodies, with no next of kin?"

Father Philip shot him a puzzled glance, then replied, "One of the charity hospitals, I suppose. People die there every day without kin. Mostly old folks, of course."

Sebastian Blue nodded, trying to recall if Geroux had commented on the age of the bodies in the plane wreck. He was sure there'd been no mention of it. Still, the charity hospitals seemed a likely place to begin. "Thank you, Father. You've been a great help."

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"I'll pray for the men who died."

Sebastian went first to the restaurant where the four had dined on Saturday evening, but they were only vaguely remembered. He had better luck at the night club near the Pantheon. It was, as the priest had warned, a disreputable place. In the early afternoon there were already of few of Rome's prostitutes lounging at the bar, though they seemed more interested in exchanging pleasantries than in soliciting trade.

"Four Englishmen," Sebastian said to the bartender. "They were here late Saturday night."

The barman stared blankly into space until Sebastian offered him an Italian banknote. Then he said, "I may remember them. They wanted girls."

"Did anyone join them—any other men?"

"I didn't notice."

"Which girls?" He glanced down the length of the bar.

"Maria was one." He indicated a dark-haired girl, a bit overweight but with a friendly smile. "Ask her."

But Maria was too experienced to the ways of police questioning. She wasn't about to risk an arrest for prostitution. "I don't know a thing," she said, speaking so fast in slangy Italian that Sebastian could barely understand. "I sat at their table and talked to them. No law against that, is there?"

"None at all. Did you go anywhere later?"

"Home to bed. Alone."

"Which man did most of the talking?"

"I don't remember."

"Was it Jenkins? Or Smothly? Blake? Younglove?"

"Younglove—that Younglove didn't say anything. I think he was wishing he was home with his wife."

"Did they mention a plane? A pilot?"

"A pilot, yes. They had to meet him later."

"Where?"

"I do not know."

"Think harder."

She tried to stare him down but then looked away. "A hospital was mentioned. The pilot was at a hospital."

"Ill?"

"No, no! Visiting—seeing someone."

"Which hospital?"

"I don't remember. Maybe they didn't say."

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Another five minutes and an offer of money convinced him he'd get no further with her. She finished her drink and headed for the door, swinging her white leather purse.

The bartender moved down to Sebastian's spot. "She's a tough baby. She tells nothing."

"You mean she has something to tell?"

The man merely smiled. Sebastian took out another banknote.

"Sure she has something to tell, but you won't get it out of her. The pilot was in here later and she made a date with him."

"You're sure of that?"

"I saw her jot down his name and address in her appointment book. Maria is very efficient. It's a business, you know?"

Sebastian reached the street in time to see Maria just turning the next corner. He kept her in sight, pausing to glance at a bookstore window while she lingered with two other girls. Then, as she set off once more alone, heading down a narrow side street off the Via del Plebiscito, he spotted two teenagers on a motor scooter. Interpol's reports had made him familiar with the Roman *scippi*, young purse snatchers who gunned their scooters along the curb while the youth behind the driver grabbed handbags from women walking too close to the pavement.

He hailed the youths and showed them a folded banknote. "Could you get that woman's purse for me?"

The driver, a long-haired boy in tight jeans, scoffed. "Are you police?"

"Do I look like it? She is my mistress, and there is evidence in the purse of her unfaithfulness. Come on, do me this favor!"

The youths needed no more persuasion. The one behind the driver snatched Sebastian's bill and said, "Wait here!" And they were off.

He watched from a distance as they followed Maria down the narrow street. Wise in the ways of the city, she was walking near the buildings, away from the curb, but this didn't stop the scooter bandits. At the proper moment the driver gunned his machine and jumped the low curb, coming up right behind her on the nearly empty sidewalk.

Maria screamed as the bag was torn from her grip and the scooter thieves made their getaway. Sebastian heard her string of profanity following them. Then the scooter vanished from sight around a corner.

Sebastian had to wait ten minutes before one of the youths re-

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turned on foot. He slipped the purse out from beneath his shirt and accepted another banknote. "Good luck with her," he said. "She is a wild one."

Sebastian stepped into an alleyway and went quickly through the purse. There was no cash—he assumed the youths had already removed that. But the little appointment book was there. He flipped to last Saturday's date and saw a single name—Dante Matto—together with the room number of a hotel across town.

Dante Matto had been the pilot's name. It was on the list of dead in Sebastian's pocket.

After a day spent questioning the people at Heath House and the friends and neighbors of the four supposed victims, Laura Charme had a number of ideas but no concrete evidence. As evening approached she decided a second visit to one of the grief-stricken widows was called for. She chose the sullen, dark-haired Alice Younglove because she had a hunch the truth might lie closer to the surface with her.

Alice Younglove lived in a modern but modest apartment not far from the Smothly home. It was obvious at once that there were no children here, though the death notice in the papers had referred to a young son.

"He's staying with my mother," Alice answered in response to Laura's question. "He's too young to realize what it's all about, but he misses his daddy."

"I've talked to your husband's coworkers at Heath House. I understand you were having financial difficulties."

"Isn't every young couple, these days?"

"The insurance money will certainly help you."

"Yes, it will."

"Of course there's always the possibility of fraud in such cases."

"Fraud?"

"Insurance fraud. Frankly, Mrs. Younglove, there's some question as to whether the body in the wreck was really that of your husband."

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?" Her sullen exterior had changed to one of near panic.

"He might be still alive. Does that news please you?"

"I—of course!"

"But then again, if he is alive, he might end up in prison."

"What are you doing to me?" the girl demanded, close to tears.

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"Only trying to get at the truth."

Alice Younglove rose and went into the kitchen. When she returned after a few moments she was more composed. "I really don't know any more than I've told you. But I'm certain my husband wouldn't have been involved in anything dishonest."

"What if I told you he never intended to return from Rome? That he'd removed some personal effects from his office before the trip?"

"That would be natural for a long trip."

"But the Rome trip was only supposed to be for a week, wasn't it?" Laura pressed on. "And you recently had your passport renewed. Odd that you'd be planning foreign travel if things are so bad financially."

"We often go to Paris in the summer. The passport was expiring, so I renewed it." She was cool again, and Laura realized she had missed the opportunity to break her.

"The insurance company will be watching, you know. If any of you four women try to leave the country and meet secretly with your husbands, you'll be discovered."

Alice Younglove leaned back on the sofa. "Now how could we do that, Miss Charme," she asked with a faint smile, "when our husbands are dead?"

Toward evening Sebastian Blue's long wait was finally rewarded. A tall slender man who might have been the missing pilot crossed the lobby of the Giallo Hotel and asked for his room key. Sebastian had already established that no one named Dante Matto was registered there, but this fact didn't surprise him. A man pretending to be dead would hardly remain registered under his real name.

But the room number was right, and Sebastian followed him up in the elevator. The man seemed nervous at the sight of another passenger and fidgeted over a cigarette until he finally managed to light it. When he got off at the fourth floor, Sebastian was right behind him.

"You looking for somebody?" he asked finally at the door of his room, turning the key in the lock.

"You, I think," Sebastian said calmly. "You are Dante Matto aren't you?"

He'd been on guard against some sudden movement, but Matto's punch still caught him off guard. The tall man's fist

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slammed into his stomach, doubling Sebastian up. He saw the fist coming down for a blow at his unprotected neck and in that instant he wished he'd bothered to learn some of Laura's judo and karate tricks.

He jerked his body away, taking the blow on the shoulder, and rolled with it. Matto started to come down on top of him, but Sebastian grabbed his legs and tumbled him over backward against his partly open door. They ended up on the floor of the hotel room, with Sebastian on top.

"Look here now, I'm too old for this sort of rough and tumble. Any more of it and I'll have to shoot you." He had slipped the small Beretta pistol out of his pocket.

"Who are you?" Matto asked, gasping for breath.

"Sebastian Blue, Interpol. You're in a great deal of trouble, as if you didn't know it."

"I—"

"Tell me about the charter flight for Heath House."

"It was nothing unusual."

Sebastian got off the man's chest and moved back, keeping the Beretta level. "The plane took off from the Rome airport on schedule—I've already checked that. But then you made a completely unscheduled landing somewhere."

"I don't know about that."

"You don't know you're listed among the dead following the crash of that plane in France?"

"I—I wasn't flying it. One of the passengers, Tom Jenkins, wanted to fly it back. He was a licensed pilot, so I saw no harm."

"What would your charter company think of that?"

"Jenkins said he'd make it right. Heath House is our biggest client. I was to stay on in Rome and he'd tell the company I was sick or something. I met this girl last week—"

"Maria."

"How did you—?"

"Never mind that. Jenkins paid you money, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"A great deal of money. He paid you not to fly the plane and he paid you to get some dead bodies for him."

"That's crazy!"

"Not so crazy. The bodies came from a charity hospital, didn't they?" Sebastian motioned with the gun. "I want a straight story."

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Matto licked his lips and eyed the weapon, as if calculating his chances. "Sure," he said finally. "I have a cousin who's an undertaker. He gets some of the city's work at hospitals and the morgue. The bodies were due to be buried in paupers' graves. I loaded them into a truck and took them to an airstrip up near Livorno. It was a joke!"

"A joke," Sebastian repeated distastefully. "How many bodies?"

"Five."

"So there was one for you too."

Matto nodded without answering.

"Where are they now—the four Englishmen?"

He shrugged. "Off to the Greek islands, I think."

"Did Jenkins fly the plane on the last leg of the trip?"

"Yeah. He set the controls and bailed out. He'd done some skydiving, so it was easy for him. Except that the plane didn't crash where they thought it would."

"You might say the joke was on them," Sebastian observed. He picked up the telephone with his free hand and gave the switchboard operator the number of Inspector Pettegolo of the Rome police.

"You're turning me in?" Matto asked.

"I've no choice. As you say, the plane didn't crash where they thought it would."

Laura was in her hotel room when the call from Rome came. She'd been expecting Sebastian to phone, and the sound of his voice gave her a warm, comfortable feeling. "It's started to rain here," she said, glancing at the spots of moisture on the window. "I hope the weather's better where you are."

"Sunny all day. How are you progressing with the widows?"

"About as expected. I've found evidence that every one of the husbands behaved unusually just before the trip—took home personal possessions from the office, picked up travel folders for South America, things like that. But the wives are keeping a united front. They're not admitting a thing."

"What about the funerals?"

"The supposed remains are being brought back in sealed coffins. There's to be a cremation and memorial service tomorrow morning." She hesitated, then poured out her frustrations. "Damn it, this case is so irritating! Nothing's happening here!"

"I'm having better luck here," Sebastian told her. "We've ar-

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rested the pilot, Dante Matto. He admits obtaining the dead bodies from a hospital here, through an undertaker who does embalming for the city. In the morning we're opening the five coffins in the cemetery. If the coffins are empty, it'll be the final proof we need that the embalmed bodies were substituted for our Englishmen."

"Any trace of them?"

"Matto claims he hasn't seen them since they left the plane at an airstrip near Livorno. Jenkins flew the plane and bailed out over northern Italy. He was to have met the other three at some undisclosed spot."

"Sebastian, if I stick with the wives I'm certain they'll make contact sooner or later."

"Maybe."

They talked for a bit longer, then hung up. For a time she sat by the window watching the rain fall into puddles of reflected light.

In the morning Sebastian met Inspector Pettagolo of the Rome police and they drove out to the cemetery, to the special area reserved for the burial of strangers and the friendless poor. It was a gloomy place, even in the bright sunshine, and Sebastian followed the Inspector between the rows of sunken plaques with a feeling of deep unease.

There were already two gravediggers at the site of the newly buried coffins, and at a signal from Pettagolo they began to shovel away the earth. "They work fast," the Inspector told Sebastian. "We'll soon know if you're correct about these coffins."

"These were the only ones buried over the weekend?"

He nodded. "These five. It seems odd the undertaker held them until he had so many."

Sebastian nodded. "He needed five, and that's why he had to embalm them. Hospital records show they died over a period of eight days."

Both men were silent as the gravediggers went about their task, occasionally muttering in Italian about the foolishness of digging up bodies so recently buried. Finally, when the first coffin rose into view, the Inspector said, "Seems heavy enough."

"Weighted down with sand, probably."

"Open it," Pettagolo instructed the men, and they began unscrewing the lid. He stepped forward to help them.

As the lid began to rise, the Inspector took one look and closed

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it again. "I am sorry, Signore Blue, but you are wrong."

"Wrong?"

"Come see for yourself—the body is still here!"

Sebastian arrived in Greater Ware the following day, and Laura was waiting for him at the station. "I thought we'd both be back in Paris by now," she said. "What have you found?"

"The case has changed," he said simply. "I have to meet the widows."

"They went to Rita Blake's house after this morning's memorial service. I've arranged with the mortuary to hold up the cremation, though. And I told the widows you'd be arriving."

"Good." He nodded approval as she led him to her rented car.

Rita Blake's home was an aging brick cottage that had obviously been well cared for. There were three cars in front, and Laura parked behind them. The women must have been watching at the window, because slim brown-haired Rita Blake appeared at the half-open front door as they approached.

"You're Sebastian Blue?" she asked. "Miss Charme told us you'd be coming."

The other three women were seated in the small living room, dressed in black, and there was an air of expectancy. "I'm afraid I have some bad news, ladies," he began. "Your husbands are dead."

"Dead?" The oldest one, whom he knew to be Mrs. Smothly, stood up. "Of course they're dead! We buried them this morning!"

"No. I mean really dead. Their bodies are in paupers' graves in a Rome cemetery."

One of the women gasped, and Mrs. Smothly looked as if she might faint. "How could that be?" Alice Younglove asked.

"We're investigating that now. It seems that insurance fraud was the initial plan, but somehow it went far beyond that. The Rome police are holding the plane's pilot, a man named Dante Matto, on four counts of murder. They've recovered the gun he used to kill your husbands."

"But—when did this happen?" Rita Blake asked.

"As near as we can tell, he killed three of them at an airstrip near Livorno, after the five corpses were substituted for the plane's passengers. Then Tom Jenkins took the plane up, set it on a course for the Alps, and bailed out. Matto met him somewhere in the north of Italy and killed him too. Then he transported the

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four bodies of your husbands back to Rome in the same truck he'd used to bring the embalmed corpses. Your husbands were then embalmed by the undertaker working with Matto, and placed in four of the five empty coffins. The fifth coffin—Matto's coffin—contained sand. The bodies were buried in the paupers' graves set aside for deaths at the charity hospital."

"How awful!" Mrs. Smothly said quietly.

She sat down again, unsteadily, the color drained from her face. "I'll get some water," Rita Blake said, hurrying into the kitchen. The other two hovered over the woman on the couch.

"Sebastian," Laura said, taking advantage of the momentary distraction and speaking in a low tone that wouldn't carry. "Why would Matto go through all that business of substituting dead bodies? If he wanted to kill them he could have sabotaged the plane, or drugged them and left their own bodies to be found in the wreckage. Why did he need the embalmed corpses? And what did he hope to gain from killing them?"

"The corpses were the husbands' idea, of course, when they planned the thing, when they dreamed of a new life in South America with their wives and all the insurance money. Their murder was an afterthought."

"Afterthought? On whose part?"

"The ones who paid Matto to do the killings," Sebastian said. "He's talking now, telling everything."

By then Mrs. Smothly had revived herself, and sipped some of the water she'd been handed. The other three, in their stark black dresses, stood behind and to the side of her. "I feel better now," she said, staring up at Sebastian and Laura. "Suppose we get on with it. Will this new development affect the insurance settlement in any way?"

Sebastian let his gaze rest on each of their faces in turn, taking in the veiled, waiting expressions. Then he said, "Your husbands planned a new life with the insurance money *and with you.* But you four planned a new life with the insurance money *and without them*. I'm sorry, ladies, but there's going to be a considerable problem about collecting on those policies."

"Q"

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